

University of Groningen

A History of ECTS, 1989-2019

Wagenaar, Robert

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:

2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Wagenaar, R. (2019). *A History of ECTS, 1989-2019: Developing a World Standard for Credit Transfer and Accumulation in Higher Education*. Bilbao and Groningen: International Tuning Academy.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

A HISTORY OF ECTS, 1989-2019

Developing a World Standard
for Credit Transfer and Accumulation
in Higher Education

Robert Wagenaar

European Community Course Credit Transfer System
European Credit Transfer System
European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System

ECTS

University of Deusto

University of Groningen



This is a publication of the International Tuning Academy based at the University of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain and the University of Groningen, The Netherlands.

Tuning Academy website: <http://www.tuningacademy.org>

© Robert Wagenaar 2019

All rights reserved

No part of this publication, including the cover design, may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, whether electronical, chemical, mechanical, optical, by recording or photocopying, without prior permission of the author.

ISBN: 978-84-1325-042-7 (printed version)

Printed and bound in Spain



Table of Contents

Preamble	5
Introduction	7
Developing a European Credit Transfer System	15
Running a project	21
Content related challenges	27
Extension of the Pilot Scheme	33
From Pilot to main stream	36
Moving towards a Credit Accumulation System	47
Bologna Process context	59
Challenging the ownership	62
Renewed interest for ECTS	71
Conclusion	83
Bibliography	89
Primary sources	89
Secondary sources	100
Annex: ECTS Key Features over time	104



Preamble

This publication celebrates the 30th anniversary of the European credit system for higher education. Its history is reflected in its full name, launched originally as the *European Community Course Credit Transfer System* in 1989, simplified to *European Credit Transfer System* in 1995 and reformed from 2002, step-by-step, into the *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (2004/5)*. Throughout the entire period the acronym *ECTS* was kept, to create a strong brand.

A History of ECTS, 1989 - 2019 is the first publication that documents the origin and the development of ECTS over time.¹ Papers that have been published about ECTS cover aspects of it, but its full and remarkable history has not yet been told. This publication intends to fill this omission. Today, the use of ECTS credit points in higher education in Europe are routinely perceived as a day-to-day reality. When ECTS was launched, initially as a pilot scheme, nothing of its kind existed. A key unique feature of ECTS was that it was based on the concept of student workload. The only established credit system at the time, the USA Carnegie System was –and still is– founded on the concept of «class hours», the so-called «credit hour». In today's world, a less appropriate system for current and more flexible forms of learning, teaching and assessment. As a result of the academics-driven Tuning Educational Structures in Europe projects, ECTS workload has been supplemented by the learning outcomes approach. This implies that ECTS credits are only awarded when the intended learning outcomes for a particular course unit are met. This addition is a con-

¹ This publication results from the slightly accommodated chapters “Working towards the credit. Creating a stable basis for comparison and compatibility in a globalizing world. Myth or Reality?” and “Making the Jump. From a European credit transfer system towards a credit accumulation system”, included in Robert Wagenaar, *REFORM ! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe. A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning*. Bilbao and Groningen, 2019. This book has been published in parallel to this publication.

sequence of the paradigm change suggested by Tuning and embraced by the Bologna Process in 2009: the student-centred approach replacing the staff-centred or expertise-driven approach. However, many universities, faculties, departments, academics, but also students, struggle at present with this paradigm change, although it is now widely accepted as the best way forward.

Although the author of this publication is solely responsible for its content, he is very grateful to Peter van der Hijden and Ingrid van der Meer who –in different capacities– have read the manuscript in great detail. Their suggestions have enhanced the text.

Introduction

«One of the most expensive dinner clubs of Europe», it was characterized by one of the professors involved in the Pilot Scheme of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System, abbreviated as ECTS. This qualification is an obvious reflection of the fact that around 1990, when this remark was made, academic and non-academic university staff were not used to discuss higher education at face-to-face meetings in a transnational setting. Both types of employees were involved in the development of the system: the non-academic staff as institutional coordinator, representing university management, and the academic staff as departmental coordinator, representing one of five disciplines involved, which were named subject areas. The feasibility study was set up for a six-year period, from 1989 to 1995. The European Commission selected Business Administration, Chemistry, History, Mechanical Engineering and Medicine as a representation of the five academic sectors, respectively Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, Humanities, Engineering and Health Care to set-up and test the system.

With the recommendation in mind of the Pietro Adonnino Ad Hoc Committee «A People's Europe» to develop a European academic credit transfer scheme to facilitate mobility² as a foundation for recognition of periods of studies taken abroad, the ERASMUS Bureau was asked by Hywel Ceri Jones and Domenico Lenarduzzi, the senior education officials at the Commission, to set-up an experimental and voluntary Pilot Scheme with direct involvement of higher education institutions.³ This ERASMUS Bureau was established in 1987 by the

² Commission of the European Communities, *A People's Europe. Report from the ad hoc Committee*. Bulletin of the European Communities. Supplement 7/1985. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1985, 25. Retrieved from: http://aei.pitt.edu/992/1/andonnino_report_peoples_europe.pdf

³ European Commission, 87/327/EEC: Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students

European Cultural Foundation (ECF) on request of the European Commission to manage the ERASMUS programme.⁴ Its staff was seconded from the ECF and other organisations.

The legal basis for the request to develop ECTS was the ERASMUS Programme –a backronym standing for *EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*– which had been proposed on 3 January 1986 by the European Commission to the European Council. It involved as Action 3 (out of a total of 4 Actions): Measures to improve academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study, comprising of the creation of a course credit transfer system valid throughout the European Community; national information centres, and development of joint curricula.⁵ It was Alan Smith, appointed director of the ERASMUS Bureau in 1987, who came up with the name ERASMUS.⁶ He fulfilled this job until 1992. Smith was an obvious choice because he had been the director of the ECF Office for Cooperation in Education (OCE) based in Brussels. This unit was responsible for the organization and implementation of the immediate predecessors of ERASMUS, the European Communities pilot projects, the Joint Study Programmes and the Short Study Visits schemes.⁷ The ERASMUS programme was adopted by the Council on 15 June 1987 after some 18 months of turbulent discussions among the then 12 members of the European Community.⁸

(Erasmus). Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A31987D0327>

⁴ European Cultural Foundation, ECG and the ERASMUS Exchange Programme – 30 years of student exchange. August 3, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/ecf-and-erasmus>; A-M. Autissier, *The European Cultural Foundation: A look back at fifty years of activity (1954-2004)*. Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2004, 10.

⁵ European Commission, Press Release Database. Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-86-145_en.htm

⁶ Siegbert Wuttig, Die Entstehung des Programm namens ERASMUS, in: *DAADeuroletter. ERASMUS Happy Birthday, ERASMUS! Die Erfolgsgeschichte der Europäischen Union feiert 25-jährigen Bestehen*. Sonderausgabe. Nationale Agentur für EU-Hochschulzusammenarbeit. August 2013, 9.

⁷ European Cultural Foundation, ECG and the ERASMUS Exchange Programme – 30 years of student exchange. August 3, 2017. Retrieved from: <http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/ecf-and-erasmus>; A-M. Autissier, *The European Cultural Foundation: A look back at fifty years of activity (1954-2004)*. ECF: Amsterdam, 2004.

⁸ Ann Corbet, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge. Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Union Higher Education Policy, 1955-2005*. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. In this book in particular chapter 8, Attaining a Goal: The Erasmus Decision, 1985-87, 118-148.

Preparatory work for ECTS was done by Fritz Dalichow, Assistant Director of the ERASMUS Bureau and as such responsible for academic recognition and credit transfer matters. Dalichow had a background as credential evaluator in the German Office for Foreign Education.⁹ In 1985 he was appointed Secretary of the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARICs) in Brussels. At the ERASMUS Bureau he was assisted by the Programme Officer Mary O'Mahony, a University of Cork BA honours graduate in European Studies, appointed in 1987, as a follow-up of an internship at the European Communities Higher Education division.¹⁰ The task of the ERASMUS Bureau was twofold: the preparation and launch of a «Call for expressions of interest from universities» to identify higher education institutions willing to participate and to develop a basic theoretical framework and methodology to develop the ECTS system and to test it in practice.

The Call was published on 27 July 1988 in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*. Universities were invited to show their interest before the end of October. The selection would be finalised one month later. In the Call a distinction was made between preparatory work and a Pilot Phase of six years to starting in the academic year 1989-1990. Full documentation on the Pilot Phase could be obtained on request from the ERASMUS Bureau. The key concept –mutual confidence– as expressed in this documentation was stipulated in the Call:

«ECTS constitutes an innovative approach to the academic recognition and credit transfer problem in Europe. On the basis of cooperation founded on the principle of mutual confidence between all participating universities, students will receive academic credit for course units, intermediate examinations and final academic qualifications for the purpose of continuing their studies at another university

⁹ John Harris, Cross National Comparison and exchange: Higher Education, in: Urban Dahllöf et al, *Dimensions of Evaluation: Report of the IMHE Study Group on Evaluation in higher education*. Higher Education Policy Series 13. London: Jessica Kingley Publishers, 1991 OECD, 156; Alma Craft, ed., *Quality Assurance in Higher Education*. Proceedings of an International Conference *Hong Kong 1991*. London: The Falmer Press, 1992, 236. In 1986 Dalichow, together with Ulrich Teichler, published *Higher education in the European Community: recognition of study abroad in the European Community: the findings of a survey of "joint study programmes"* prepared at the request of the Office for Cooperation in Education for the Commission of the European Communities. Luxembourg, 1986.

¹⁰ European Commission, *What is ECTS? Leaflet prepared by the ERASMUS Bureau*. Brussels, 1989; LinkedIn profile Mary O'Mahoney.

within the ECTS system. Universities participating in ECTS will do so on a voluntary basis, once selected by the Commission on the basis of their applications.»¹¹

In 1987-1988 the ERASMUS Bureau defined a set of basic features which were turned into a brochure –the full documentation that could be obtained on request according to the Call– which was pro-actively translated in the languages of the member states and sent to all higher education institutions in the summer of 1988, accompanied by an invitation to apply for participation.¹² In two scholarly papers published in 1991 and 1992 respectively, Fritz Dalichow outlined and explained the choice for the concept (a credit system based on the notion of student workload) and its principles. An important source of inspiration was the US credit system, which Dalichow stipulated correctly was not a national system meant for transfer, but a system used by several thousands of different types of higher education institutions to organize study programmes. The US system, also known as the Carnegie System, was developed at the end of the nineteenth century. The number of credits in this system is fixed on the basis of the number of class hours, called credit hours. One year of successful studies represents 32 credits, that is 16 per semester. Dalichow concluded that the system might work well as a credit system, but it did far less well as a mechanism for transfer of periods of studies. This was due to the different types of institutions in the US, ranging from Community Colleges to Research Universities, as well as to the difference in level. It did not seem the ideal basis to start a credit transfer system in Europe. Nevertheless, he identified three «tools» which he thought worth «borrowing» for the development of ECTS: the idea of the credit itself, the «American institutional calendar or catalogue» and the «transcript of records».¹³

¹¹ European Commission, ERASMUS European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Call for expressions of interest from universities (88/C 197/08). Official Journal of the European Communities No C 197/11 27.7.1988. Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC_1988_197_R_0011_01&from=EN

¹² Fritz Dalichow, Mutual Recognition and Transfer of Credits, in: Alma Craft ed., *Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Proceedings of an International Conference Hong Kong 1991*. London: The Falmer Press, 1992, 189.

¹³ Fritz Dalichow, European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS): A Leading Concept for TransEuropean and Trans-Atlantic Student Exchange?, in: *Higher Education Policy*. Vol. 4, No. 3, 1991, 44-45.

After selecting the universities to participate in the five subject area groups, applying the rule that larger countries (DE, ES, FR, IT and UK) would participate with two institutions and smaller ones (BE, DK, GR, IR, NL and PT) with one university in each group, it chose five group coordinators. These were taken from the departmental coordinators, whose details were included in the applications of the universities. The selected coordinators, who became in practice part of the management team to develop the ECTS Pilot Scheme until 1995, were: Jean-Jacques Bonnet (Toulouse / Chemistry), Willy Dutré (Leuven / Mechanical Engineering), Steven Fox (Lancaster / Business Administration), Joao Relvas (Coimbra / Medicine) and Robert Wagenaar (Groningen / History). These academics were called *subject area coordinators* (SACs) on suggestion of the group coordinator from Groningen. They were invited for a preparatory meeting, which preceded the first ECTS Plenary Meeting. The meeting was co-chaired by Angelika Verli-Wallace, representing the European Commission, and Alan Smith. Verli and Dalichow would become the public faces of ECTS in the years to come, and were nicknamed its mother and father. The first Plenary Meeting was hosted by the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) on 26 and 27 January 1989. At this meeting the 84 selected higher education institutions (81) and consortia (3) were represented. These would act as the «Inner Circle» of the project. Those not selected, were invited to become part of an Outer Circle. The latter would be kept informed about the progress of the Pilot Scheme, open to those interested in the Scheme at any time, but would not be involved in the development process or obtain any financial support. A total of 720 departments from 308 higher education institutions covering nearly the full spectrum of academic subject areas (though not limited to the five covered in the Pilot) expressed interest in 1988 to be part of the Outer Circle.¹⁴

The number of Inner Circle institutions was (significantly) higher than the number included in the initial plans, namely 77 compared to 20 originally.¹⁵ It showed the interest of the educational sector in this bold new initiative. The Commission received a total of 464 appli-

¹⁴ Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschema*. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 12.

¹⁵ Siegbert Wüttig, Die Entwicklung von ECTS im Überblick. In Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), *Success Stories IV. Das European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in Deutschland.*, Bonn, 2001, 15.

cations from 254 higher education institutions. The selection was made on the basis of the following five criteria: strength in the academic field concerned, regional outreach of the institution, commitment towards European cooperation, proven interest in the mobility of credits and ECTS and the motivation to support the structures of the Pilot Scheme. The total number of persons that would attend the first General Meeting was 170.¹⁶

All in all, it was a rather small team –ERASMUS Bureau, Commission staff and the five subject area coordinators– that took on the responsibility to steer the process of developing ECTS. The team was not only small, but also rather inexperienced regarding the topic involved – the development of a credit transfer system to be applied in all twelve European Community member states. None of them had any serious experience with the application of the notion of student workload and a related credit system.

At the time, the only country in Europe that had introduced the philosophy of student workload in higher education was the Netherlands. In 1976 a guideline had been formally defined to protect the student. It required that student workload was indicated in terms of hours and fixed at 1700 hours per year. This model could be –and actually was– also applied for transfer purposes between institutions within the Netherlands. From the academic year 1988-1989 a national credit system based on the concept of student workload was introduced by law: 42 credits per year equalling the planned number of working weeks per year, each week holding 40 working hours as in the case of a regular full-time employee. This made 1680 hours a year, a number which is still included in the Dutch law for higher education.¹⁷

There were two other European Communities countries in which the notion of credit had been introduced: Portugal and the United Kingdom. In Portugal a law was introduced in 1980 which allowed the use of credits, but it was not compulsory and required the approval of the Ministry of Education. Many institutions did not make use of the possibility. The Portuguese Ministry of Education observed in 2006

¹⁶ Commission of the European Communities, Annual Report ERASMUS Programme 1989 (COM (90) 128 Final). Brussels, 5 April 1990, 9; Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschema*. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 13.

¹⁷ M.J.F. Hulthof et al, *Studielaastbepaling in Nederland en omliggende landen*. Nijmegen: IOWO instituut voor onderwijskundige dienstverlening, april 2000, 1, 5, 21-23.

–the year Portugal introduced ECTS as its credit system– that «assignment of credits to a course tends to be based on a rather rigid or even bureaucratic way of counting the number of classroom hours of teaching, without consideration for the student’s actual workload».¹⁸ The UK claims that the introduction of a credit system can be traced back to the 1960s, and was adopted by a significant number of polytechnics in the 1970s. In those years also the notion of credit transfer was introduced by the UK-wide Council of National Academic Awards (CNAA) and the Open University. CNAA launched the idea of a national Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) a decade later, in the second half of the 1980s with 120 credits per academic year, but only in 1998 a national higher education credit framework was created.¹⁹

The question answered in this publication is how a small inexperienced team with the active support of the universities and their staff members involved in the Pilot Scheme turned an ambitious idea –possibly completely unrealistic– into a working system. A system that found wider implementation after its pilot phase. Then the question will be answered what was required to convert ECTS from a transfer system used only for mobility purposes into a full-fledged overarching European credit transfer and accumulation system which would become the national credit system for the vast majority of Bologna signatory countries. A workload based system that developed into a system in which the awarding of credits depended on meeting the intended competences / learning outcomes.

¹⁸ Report prepared by the Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education as input to the OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education. Country Background Report: Portugal. September 2006, paragraph 69. Retrieved on 23 May 2018 from: <https://www.oecd.org/portugal/37745972.pdf>

¹⁹ Emma Ollard, et al, *Credit Transfer in Higher Education. A review of the literature*. UK Department of Education. March 2017, 28-30.



Developing a European Credit Transfer System

There was no experience regarding the use of credit (transfer) systems based on student workload when ECTS was introduced. The Adonnino Ad Hoc Committee probably had a sort of US Carnegie System in mind when it proposed to underpin its plan to set up a European Communities-wide mobility system. It realised at the same time that a system could not be imposed on the higher education institutions and their programmes and had to be implemented «by means of bilateral agreements or on a voluntary basis by universities and higher education establishments which, by arrangements with one another, would determine the procedures for academic recognition of such credits».

What was available at the time besides a political decision of the European Council? In transfer terms: the Inter-university Cooperation Programmes (ICPs), the core of the ERASMUS Programme launched in 1987, in which valid recognition arrangements had been made conditional, which was a major step forward to overcome the barrier for large-scale mobility. However, as Dalichow stipulated correctly at the time, ICPs operated in a closed environment, uniting typically similar departments and a fixed slot in a programme that suited mobility best. ECTS was intended to be more ambitious by facilitating mobility in a much more general and wider setting. Was there anything in this respect that we could learn from the US experience regarding transfer arrangements? If so, that would not be of much help. The US system in use was (and still is) based on *a posteriori* recognition procedure based on three elements: (1) the quality of institution from where to transfer the obtained credits, (2) the comparability of the nature, content and levels of credits awarded and (3) «the appropriateness and applicability of the awarded credit to the programme offered by the receiving institution, in light of the student's educational goals».²⁰

²⁰ Fritz Dalichow, European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS), in: *Journal Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. 15, 1990, 45.

In the eyes of the developers of ERASMUS, the aim of ECTS should be the establishment of an approach that would allow mobility –for which students themselves could decide place and duration at any moment during their studies– based on academic recognition *a priori*. It all boiled down to the assumption that «mutual confidence» should and would offer a sufficiently reliable basis. Already at the launch of the Pilot Scheme it was decided that «trust» was required in addition to «mutual confidence», underpinning two hypotheses. Firstly, higher education institutions in the EC are very different, but they are highly comparable in terms of quality. Secondly, academics will rely on the quality, course content and academic judgment of colleagues in other EC countries. It should guarantee automatic *a priori* recognition. This was thought a realistic approach because in comparison with the hierarchical structure in the USA where higher education ranged from community colleges to flagship (private) universities, European higher education was perceived as much more egalitarian.

The first ECTS General meeting would show that both hypotheses could not be taken for granted. First of all, ECTS had to deal with particular national peculiarities such as the difference between Grandes Écoles (FR) and the Scuola Normale (IT) on the one hand, and regular universities on the other. There were also many countries with binary systems, making the distinction between research-intensive universities and universities of applied sciences. Both types would be represented in the Pilot Scheme. Secondly, educational practice proved to differ more fundamentally than expected by the initiators of the Pilot Scheme. This was particularly the case for Business Administration and for History, due to the wide variety of courses on offer. It was initially –wrongly– presumed that programmes in those fields would be more flexible regarding credit transfer and recognition than more regulated and/or structured subject areas, such as medicine, mechanical engineering and chemistry. Programmes in some countries had clear structures, but not in others. Content of programmes was prescribed by government in some, while in other countries universities had full autonomy. In some countries education was based on knowledge transfer and acquisition by (only or mainly) using the model of lectures and oral examinations, while in others there was more focus on more active forms of learning reflected in a seminar approach. In other words, the different educational cultures and traditions in Europe, the Humboldtian, the Anglo-Saxon and the Napoleonic models proved to be a reality with which the Pilot Scheme had to learn to deal. No wonder that both inside the EC unit

responsible for higher education, and in the higher education sector in general there were many that were rather sceptical about the feasibility of the introduction of ECTS.

The more technical aspects of defining ECTS were perceived as less challenging. First of all, the arbitrary choice was made to equal 60 credits with one full year of study. At the ECTS launch meeting at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in Brussels the European Commission explained this number by using the argument that 60 could easily be divided into 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6, accommodating a semester (30), a trimester (20), a half semester (15) and a half trimester (10) model. What might have played a role, but was not expressed as such, was that 60 was more or less the double number (32 credit hours per year) applied in the US / Carnegie System. More important was that 60 was a handy number when allocating credits to individual course units – allowing for great flexibility –, also in the case of a modularised system, as was the case in the US. In the US a credit hour represents 39 to 42 student working hours, that is 3 hours x 13 to 14 semester weeks. This makes 1248-1344 hours per academic year. A credit hour represents either one lecture hour plus two hours of independent work (preparation and assignments) or 3 lab hours. Besides this model also variations are in use, with small deviations to the one described.²¹ The practical tools «borrowed» from the US system, that is the course catalogue and the transcript of records, proved indeed to be essential for developing ECTS.

The first two ECTS General meetings, both part of the preparatory phase, were decisive for the future of the Pilot Scheme. The institutions involved proved to be willing to accept the ECTS model and its main features as presented by the European Commission and the ERASMUS Bureau, but they did request a higher budget than originally reserved by the Commission for their efforts during the first 18 months of the Pilot. As a result of a firm discussion each institution would obtain ECU 13.415 instead of the planned ECU 10.000.²² This was the maximum amount the EC could afford. Furthermore, each institution would receive ECU 10.000 for 5 ECTS student mobility grants covering a full academic year of studies. As in the case of the regular ERASMUS mobility scheme, which had (much) lower grants,

²¹ When the UK had to decide on its model, the Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS), it also chose for a high number of credits per academic year, that is 120, to facilitate flexibility.

²² ECU stands for European Currency Unit and became the construct for the Euro from 1999. Notes and coins were introduced 3 years later on 1 January 2002.

the ECTS grants would be made available through the services of national agencies. This rather substantial grant for the ECTS mobility should make participation attractive.²³

In return for the institutional grant the Institutional and the Departmental Coordinator of each higher education institution were expected to take up a number of tasks. For the Departmental Coordinator the very first was to allocate a number of credits to each course unit of the involved programme(s). This number should be based on the «relative value» of a particular course unit in a programme, but at the same time reflect what a typical student would be able to do during one academic year. The outcome of this exercise required validation of his or her department. We will return to this topic again because of its complexity and principle.

Both the Institutional and Departmental coordinators were made responsible for the production of an ECTS Information Package with a fixed model, which contained an institutional and a departmental part. Items to be covered in the first part were: name and general description of the higher education institution, academic calendar and enrolment procedure (general and academic terms, language requirements, specific terms for ECTS-students), and, furthermore, information about accommodation available, healthcare and insurance procedures and the average living costs. The information of the department was split into two: a description of the unit itself and a description of the course units on offer. The first part covered the name of the departmental coordinator, a description of the department, including fields of specialisation, an outline of the degree programmes (structure, length, type of degree and diploma, rules and regulations), and enrolment procedures. The second part provided details about each individual course unit: the number of teaching hours per week, type of delivery (lecture, seminar, lab work), period of the year taught, type of assessment and the number of ECTS credits allocated to the course unit, a description of its content (up to 10 lines) and the name of the teacher.²⁴ The ECTS information package had to be published in English and the native language (if different).

²³ *Erasmus Newsletter* No. 1. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1989, 10. Last time retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: http://aei.pitt.edu/81797/1/1989_Volume_-_No_1.pdf

²⁴ Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschem*a. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 21, 34-35.

At the first two General ECTS meetings, of which the second was hosted by the University of Navarre in Pamplona on 11-12 April 1989, a number of key challenges were identified and discussed. Linguistic preparation, seen as a shared responsibility of sending and receiving institutions, was perceived as a key factor for successful studies. To facilitate the mobility period emphasis was put on «excellent advanced counselling» and «provisions for appropriate reception and accommodation facilities» upon arrival. Other issues discussed were the differences in academic calendars, evaluation of the pilot scheme and the computerization to support the organisation of the mobility process.²⁵ Due to the fact that the personal computer had not been widely introduced yet in the first half of the 1990s, and wide use of e-mail only took place in the second half of the 1990s, the postal services would be the main instrument for exchanging information during the pilot phase, besides phone and telefax.

Regarding the academic calendars three rather fundamental issues were addressed: the structure of the academic year –undivided versus semester and trimester systems –, length of the academic year, and start and finish of teaching and exam periods. With recognition of studies abroad being the major concern, a mobility period in most cases should cover a full academic year. Another effect was that it had to be agreed that more flexibility in granting credit was required when awarding a final degree or diploma in the setting of the ECTS pilot scheme than in the case of the regular ERASMUS scheme. As part of the pilot scheme it was foreseen that not all students would return to their university of origin, but would continue their studies at the host university to obtain its diploma.²⁶

This philosophy and principle was explained on the basis of the exemplary but fictional Dutch history student Wim Mulder in the 2nd edition of the ECTS Users' Guide published in 1990.²⁷ Mulder, who had good knowledge of German, English and French started his academic studies in the Netherlands, where he was awarded the *Prope-deuse* degree after completing one year of studies. Then he moved to a German university where after another year of studies he met the requirements for the *Diplomvorprüfung* or *Zwischenprüfung*. Having been awarded two intermediate degrees, he then took up his studies at an English university, where he obtained a Bachelor degree after

²⁵ *Erasmus Newsletter* No. 1, 10.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ This type of mobility indeed occurred in reality during the Pilot Phase years, although the number was limited.

one more year of successful studies. This BA was his entrance ticket to a fourth year in France to be awarded the *Maîtrise* after another successful year of studies. In total Mulder obtained 240 ECTS credits.²⁸ This tour de force was visualized in a full colour poster showing Wim Mulder and his red sports car which would drive him from country to country to pick up ECTS credits and degrees. The sports car is a wink to the one owned by Fritz Dalichow.²⁹ Besides this poster, the ERASMUS Bureau produced another 3 or 4 posters with different images and messages which were distributed to the Inner Circle universities to draw attention to the ECTS Pilot Scheme. They came in addition to a leaflet that offered a short introduction to ECTS Pilot Scheme and listed the participating higher education institutions, including the names of the institutional and departmental coordinators participating in the Pilot Scheme.³⁰ On top each of the subject area groups also produced a leaflet at the request of the European Commission. It shows that the Pilot Scheme was supported by a constant flow of promotion and information materials.

A serious concern proved to be a balanced distribution of mobility students over the different member states and institutions. At the Pamplona meeting, it was decided to introduce the principle of clearing house meetings to be held before the summer break. However, even after the clearing house there was still an imbalance in the first year in the distribution of the 569 students that participated in the scheme. Increasingly, Belgium, The Netherlands, Ireland and the UK became the net «importers». Over the years –due to the clearing house procedures and pro-active behaviour (language preparation and pre-selection for less popular destinations) of students interested in the scheme– the overall balance improved.³¹

²⁸ Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschem. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: Erasmus Bureau, 1990, 17-18, 24-25.

²⁹ Robert Wagenaar, An Introduction to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), in: Eric Froment, Jürgen Kohler, Lewis Purser and Lesley Wilson, eds., *EUA Bologna Handbook, Making Bologna Work*, Vol 1, B 2.4-1, Berlin, Stuttgart, 2006: Jacob Raabe Verlag, 1.

³⁰ Commission of the European Communities, *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. European Community Course Credit Transfer System*. Leaflet. Brussels, 1989.

³¹ Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report ERASMUS Programme*. COM (90) 128 Final. Brussels, 5 April 1990, 10.

Running a project

While ERASMUS was set up as a programme, the ECTS Pilot Scheme had all the characteristics of a project. As a project, it met the definition of «a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service».³² Uncertainty is a key feature of any project. It relates to factors such as planning, implementation, timeline, budget, but in particular the achievement of its goals. Regarding uncertainty, a distinction can be made between operational and contextual factors. The operational ones are related to the implementation process itself and can range from highly innovative to more routine-based. The contextual factors can be impacted by a number of elements: the (un)known environment, scope and status of the project and the possibilities to influence its effects and, finally, predictions regarding its outcomes. It is well acknowledged that projects have a tendency to overrun in time and budget as a result of one or both factors. This in particular is the case for larger and more complicated projects. The level of uncertainty is also related to the amount of information available. Constant monitoring and evaluation influence (a successful) outcome. In addition, project management is an important element.³³

As in all projects, also in the ECTS Pilot Scheme multiple roles / players can be distinguished: a client or financier –the European Commission, the project operator or management –the ERASMUS Bureau plus the five subject area coordinators (SACs) and the users– the higher education institutions and their students. The features of a project as described above highly correlate with the ECTS Pilot Scheme. Although for ECTS the project purpose was defined as part of the planning phase, less clear was what the final product should be. In this respect, it is interesting to note that according to project theory a distinction is made between the perspectives of the three players identified. While the focus of the European Commission was in particular on the project purpose –developing a working model for student mobility guaranteeing full recognition– the users were more interested in the immediate goal, that is a smooth implementation process. The main focus of the management team, ERASMUS Bureau and SACs

³² Project Management Institute (PMI), What is Project Management? Retrieved on 1 May 2018 from: <https://www.pmi.org/about/learn-about-pmi/what-is-project-management>

³³ Knut Samset, Features of a project. Extract from the textbook «*Project Evaluation. Making Investments Succeed.*» Tapir Academic Press, 2003. Retrieved on 1 May 2018 from: https://www.ntnu.no/documents/1261860271/1262022437/058_2004_samset_what_is_a_project.pdf

was the quality of the product. This implied a high level of monitoring in which the SACs and the Bureau had different roles. The Bureau concentrated on the more technical aspects while the SACs had their eye in particular on content related aspects. As academics, they had an understanding of their academic field, communalities and differences in approaches applied and the challenges related to student mobility. Coordinating the activities of the Subject Area Groups, organizing and presiding its meetings, they acted as the intermediate between Commission and ERASMUS Bureau and as the confidant of their groups. It was a challenging role because at the same time they were part of the management team of the Pilot Scheme.

To complicate matters the users were at the same time participants of the project and expected to deliver. This implied inbuilt tensions between the different players and their expectations, which proved not always to be fully aligned. The annual final reports of the subject area coordinators are illuminating in this respect. Each of the five subject area coordinators was asked to produce a rather detailed report based on a fixed format covering, for example, coordination work on ECTS Information Packages, information activities at Commission and Institutional level, contributing to the resolution of specific problems at the level of participating institutions and an analysis of implemented student mobility and credit transfer. Complementary to the monitoring process, was the survey of student opinions regarding the outcomes. The most relevant one concerns the academic year 1989-90, implemented by a team led by Ulrich Teichler. Teichler had also been made responsible for the evaluation of the ICPs of ERASMUS.³⁴

Given the type of project and the role of its participants, the applied approach can be called «educational action research», which made it an action research project. This was also how Coopers & Lybrand labelled the Pilot in its ECTS evaluation report of 1993 (see below), because it was designed to test as well as to refine ECTS principles and mechanisms.³⁵ Action research as a concept was developed shortly after WWII, and related to education in the UK in the second half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. It is a method which

³⁴ Friedrich Maiworm, Wolfgang Steube and Ulrich Teichler, *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration: The View of the Students*. ERASMUS Monographs No.15. Werkstattberichte –Band 37. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1992.

³⁵ Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, *Evaluation of the pilot phase of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Final Report*. Brussels: Coopers & Lybrand, February 1993, paragraph 14.

is applied for improving practice, and involves action, evaluation, and critical reflection. Changes in practice are implemented on the basis of evidence gathered. It is participative and collaborative, situation-based and context specific. Reflection is developed based on interpretations made by the participants, and knowledge is created through action and at the point of application. It may involve problem solving, if the desired outcome is the improvement of practice. Finally, findings will emerge as action develops, but these are not conclusive or absolute.³⁶

Naming the ECTS Pilot Scheme an action research project seems to be accurate given the overwhelming number of issues and challenges that required discussion and solution. As we will see, for many only provisional solutions or practical compromises could be found. Cultural differences as well as a wide variety of educational formats proved to be very real. The contribution of the ECTS Pilot Scheme was that it made differences visible, which is a condition for building trust and confidence.

Including the two general meetings, which were part of the start-up phase, a total of five general meetings or plenary meetings as they were called, took place during the lifespan of the project. Besides these, there were subject area meetings, on average two per year. Also site visits to individual institutions were organized. The additional three plenaries took place in Copenhagen, on 19-21 February 1990, in Thessaloniki, 30 November – 2 December 1991 and Toulouse on 25-27 October 1992. They all followed a comparable format, which would be copied and refined by Tuning for its meetings a decade later. A preparatory meeting of the Management team, followed by two meeting days constituting of a plenary meeting at the start and end, and subject area group meetings in between. The plenary meetings, in particular the opening sessions, were mainly perceived as «political» by its participants –the Commission explaining its position and policies– while the gatherings of the groups were seen as the real working meetings. Although there were a number of topics that were clearly overarching, most proved to be subject specific. Nevertheless, the importance of these general meetings should not be underestimated, because they offered a platform for discussing highly relevant topics for student mobility in general. Student mobility initiated by ERASMUS at a scale never applied before did indeed identify issues to be solved. ECTS proved not only to be applicable as a Pilot Scheme for

³⁶ Valsa Koshy, *Action Research for Improving Educational Practice. A Step-by-step guide*. London: Sage, Second Edition, 2010, 2 and 4. Retrieved from: https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/36584_01_Koshy_et_al_Ch_01.pdf

developing a transnational credit system, but also as a controlled environment for finding solutions for the challenges that arose and for testing these solutions.

First of all, the first challenge was the paperwork. It started with the application form. The ERASMUS Bureau came up with a form, which proved to be rather unpractical to use, in particular in a fax machine. It triggered the History group and its coordinator to revise it completely, which –after some further modifications– was used from 1991 until the termination of the Pilot Scheme. It was no different for the course catalogue. The History Group presented the «ideal information package», prepared again by its coordinator, which was based on an analysis of three successive editions and a merger of good practices for different items as included in the individual higher education brochures of the group. Its outline contained precise headings for four chapters and its sub-chapters. The chapters identified were, besides a general introduction to ECTS: a). information on the institution; b). information on the department/faculty; and c). course descriptions. The model was a response to the continuous criticisms regarding the quality, incompleteness and reliability of the existing information packages. The criticisms started with serious complaints expressed at the only student-evaluation meeting that was organised during the lifespan of the Pilot Scheme. The meeting took place in Leuven / Louvain-la-Neuve on 29-30 October 1990, and was also attended by subject area coordinators. In too many cases the Info-packs proved to contain out of date information about the educational offer.³⁷ The opinions of the 34 students who participated in the evaluation meeting were confirmed by an independent student survey of the first year. In the publication *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration: The View of the Students* (1992) it is concluded rather straightforwardly that the preparation at the home institution for the study period abroad was not very good in the first year of the ECTS pilot scheme. There was also severe criticism about the quality of information offered by host institutions. With some understatement the report stipulates that «Comments about the ECTS information packages were not necessarily enthusiastic with less than half of the students rating them useful for the choice of the host university and for the choices of courses».³⁸

³⁷ Robert Wagenaar, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1990-1991 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. ERASMUS – European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Groningen, 1991, 3.

³⁸ Friedrich Maiworm, Wolfgang Steube and Ulrich Teichler, *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration: The View of the Students*. ERASMUS Monographs No.15. Werkstatt-

This was a rather disturbing observation, because the Information Package was meant to be one of the core ECTS mechanisms, the main formal medium for communicating information about the host institution. The state of affairs, as expressed in the Coopers & Lybrand report, published in the first months of 1993, is more mixed. It states that «many of our interviewees commented that the standard and coverage of other institutions» information packages had improved greatly since the first year of the pilot. Some staff interviewed suggested, however, that it was still common for information packages to be incomplete in that they did not cover the basic core content».³⁹ It showed the initiative of the History Subject Area Group was timely. The model was input for a working group on credit allocation and information packages convened by the Commission of European Communities on 6 July 1993. Its aim: to improve the allocation of credits to course units and the quality of the information packages. Taking into account an analysis of all information packages, the existing model table, the proposal for «an ideal Information Package, submitted by Robert Wagenaar» and various suggestions of the members of the working group as well as all subject area coordinators a new «model of table of content for an ECTS Information Package» was agreed and distributed.⁴⁰ This model table would be kept in place until 2004 when a major revision of ECTS was agreed.

It was again the History group that came up in the same year with another «paperwork» innovation, the introduction of the «learning contract», which would be re-named «Learning Agreement». The term was introduced in a new information brochure published by the European Commission in 1994.⁴¹ The Learning Agreement proved to be a key ECTS document, besides the Information Package and the Transcript of Records. In practice, it meant a revision of the application form which also contained an indicative overview of the selected course units a student planned to take. This approach did not satisfy.

berichte – Band 37. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1992, 14, 120.

³⁹ Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, *Evaluation of the pilot phase of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Final Report*. Brussels: Coopers & Lybrand, February 1993, paragraph 446.

⁴⁰ Commission of the European Communities, *Guidelines for Information Packages*, 1993. Included in the Final Report for the Academic Year 1992-1993 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History. Groningen: University of Groningen, 1993.

⁴¹ Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS. ECTS Overdrachtsysteem van studiepunten van de Europese Gemeenschap*. Luxemburg: Bureau voor officiële publikaties der Europese Gemeenschappen, 1994, 7.

To assure *a priori* recognition for course units taken successfully a formal document was required to be signed by the two departmental coordinators and the student involved. The document should list the course units selected before arrival and included additional space to make adjustments to replace course units that proved (no longer) to be available, or because the student had changed his/her mind. The final list should match the Transcript of Records to be offered after the mobility period by the host institution. This transcript should only contain the units for which credits and a mark were awarded. Before the start of the mobility period and in addition to the application form the sending or home institution was also expected to prepare a Transcript of Records containing all successfully completed course units. The information on this Transcript was meant to ensure that the course units to be enrolled in the host institution were of the appropriate level. The data resulting from the first year showed that this was not superfluous. According to the student survey 31% of the course units taken was thought to be of a not sufficiently demanding level.⁴²

It was stipulated –also to the wider world– that the Transcript of Records should be perceived as a legal document, a written proof for students and other stakeholders of successfully completed course units. Information included should be easily and generally understood, have a common format and be produced in one of the major European languages. The outcome of the ECTS Pilot discussions was that besides identifying the student (including matriculation date and number), it should include the name of the institution where the student was officially registered, and by definition should hold the name of the department issuing the transcript plus, as crucial information: course unit title, code, duration and workload, as well as the grade awarded. It should be possible at any time to relate this information to information included in the Information Package. Course unit load should according to the ECTS philosophy be related to student workload (relative weight) and not to contact hours.⁴³ In practice, countries and universities basing their education on the Napoleonic model proved to have great difficulties to separate teaching hours from student workload. They «demanded» a minimum number of «contact» or

⁴² Friedrich Maiworm, Wolfgang Steube and Ulrich Teichler, *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration*, 122.

⁴³ Robert Wagenaar, Transcripts. Session 1.07. European Association for International Cooperation. 5th annual conference «Europe and Beyond». The Hague, 2-4 December 1993.

teaching hours to make the Transcript a reliable basis for recognition. It was symbolic for the clashes of cultures the ECTS Pilot had to deal with.

Content related challenges

This was only the paperwork. More critical were a number of highly fundamental principles to be decided. The first question to be answered was what the basis should be for awarding credit. At the very start of the Pilot it was agreed that credits could only be awarded for course work that had been assessed and passed successfully. From the perspective that credits should reflect student workload this was not self-evident. In Germany for example students were expected to take lecture courses («Vorlesungen») which were not concluded with an examination, but were meant as a contribution to developing a scholarly attitude and to transfer knowledge and develop understanding. That was experienced as part of the learning process. This involved time and therefore workload, which could not be credited. The underlying principle of the ECTS pilot, was that formal learning should always be measured.

Another issue was the allocation of credits to courses. As has been already mentioned, the notion of «relative value» was introduced as one of the ECTS features. This has to be understood against the background that it was initially meant to be a «credit reference system» for transfer and recognition purposes. The allocation of credits over a degree programme and its academic years seemed to be a simple exercise, but it proved to be much more complicated than initially expected. In a modularized system –such as that of the US– it looks rather simple: every unit has a fixed number of credits, 3 or a combination adding up to 3 (e.g. 1+2). This works well when a programme is feasible, which means that students are able to study according to schedule. In many countries this proved not really to be the case. The extreme was Italy. Although at the time the official length of the *Laurea* degree was four to six years depending on the subject area, it would take students up to twice as long –if they finished at all. The example of the subject area of History is illustrative. According to the formal programme students should take 21 modules and prepare a final thesis in four years. This implied taking 6 course units in one academic year, while in reality only 4 seemed to be realistic in terms of student workload. The two Italian universities included in the Inner Circle, Bologna and Pisa, applied slightly different

calculations. Incoming students were expected to take 4 course units in Pisa and 5 in Bologna to obtain 60 ECTS credits, while in both Bologna and Pisa 60 credits awarded by a host partner institution were recognized as the equivalence of 4 Italian course units.⁴⁴

But there was more. It was debated whether complexity of a topic / course unit should affect the number of credits to be awarded. As a core principle, it was decided that only student workload should be decisive. When developing the European credits for vocational education and training system (ECVET) around 2005 a different direction was taken, which as a result made ECTS and ECVET incompatible. See below for more detail. Furthermore, the decision was taken in ECTS that credits would not be linked to a particular level as in the US system (100, 200, 300 level etc. reflecting the successive year of the degree programme). This was thought not to be feasible in a European context with quite different educational traditions. It would also limit flexibility. Furthermore, it was observed that initially within departments the factor «prestige» was brought into play as an element to allocate credits: a subject taught by a more prestigious member of staff, e.g. a senior full professor, should –according to this line of thinking– be awarded more credits although the actual student workload would not justify this. This kind of thinking would diminish over time, after more experience was built up. Finally, the working group on Credit Allocation and Information Packages observed at its meeting in 1993 that there were still institutions that related workload only to teaching hours, not taking independent work into account. It also noted that not in all cases the distribution of credits for each academic year added up to 60 a year and/or 30 per semester.⁴⁵

The wide variations in the organization of the academic year between the different member states was another factor to cope with. Not only the length of the academic year differed, but also the start and end dates. The actual start of courses varied between the beginning of September and the end of November. As other overarching challenges, –independent of the academic field– were identified the digitalization of information, language preparation and grade transfer. At the fifth General ECTS meeting which took place in the au-

⁴⁴ Robert Wagenaar, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1993-1994 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. ERASMUS – European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Groningen, 1994. In this report the Minutes of the Autumn Meeting of the Subject Area Group of History, Alcalá de Henares, 4 November 1993, 7.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

tumn of 1992 workshops were organized to stress the importance of these themes. With five years of ERASMUS mobility and 3 years of ECTS experience in mind, the importance of language skills in international mobility was confirmed. However, the importance given to language preparation and language learning in general differed from one institution to another, ranging from pure addendum to fully integrated in the study programme. A difference was made between «survival competence», which would require 200 contact hours to prepare for a new language, and «study competence», which would ask for much more.⁴⁶ Clear indicators about language proficiency were lacking at the time, because the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* of the Council of Europe had not yet been developed. First steps were made from 1991 onward, but the system became only operational a decade later.⁴⁷

Also the transfer, recognition and conversion of grades –besides the transfer and recognition of credits– proved to be a highly challenging issue. In the second edition of the ECTS Users' Guide (1990) an ECTS grading scale was introduced, which intended to offer transparency regarding the performance of student in comparative perspective. Seemingly, it was inspired by the German model, running from 1 to 4, each number reflecting one quarter in decreasing performance: 1 being the top 25 % of successful students.⁴⁸ The scale did not satisfy the users. Therefore, the European Commission took the initiative to establish a special working group. The group met twice before a proposal, prepared by Richard Whewell of Strathclyde University, Glasgow, could be presented at the fourth ECTS General Plenary meeting in November 1991. The proposal, which was received well, was an obvious compromise, combining the best of two worlds, in practice two completely different philosophies. It combined numerical definitions with qualitative expressions underpinned by definitions. The new ECTS grading scale presented as a facilitating scale was based on five ECTS pass grades and two fail grades, ranging from A (best 10%

⁴⁶ Erasmus Bureau, ERASMUS. European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. Fifth Plenary Meeting. Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse 25-27 October 1992. Minutes. (ERAB/93/ECTS/Plenary Meeting/25-27 Oct 92/Minutes).

⁴⁷ Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Retrieved from: https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf

⁴⁸ Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS. ECTS Overdrachtsysteem van studiepunten van de Europese Gemeenschap*. Tweede editie. Luxemburg: Bureau voor officiële publikaties der Europese Gemeenschappen, 1990, 22-23.

of successful students), B (next 25%), C (next 30%), D (next 25%) and E (next 10%). The letters were linked to the qualifications excellent, very good, good, satisfactory and sufficient, following in practice the Dutch model.⁴⁹ Although, it seemed to be a sophisticated system, practice would show in the following years that higher education institutions were not able or motivated to underpin the qualifications with statistical data reflecting the grading curve or distribution of successful students.

Besides these general challenges –which are reflected in the ECTS key features defining the core of the system– there were also subject specific issues, in particular emerging in Business Administration and History, due to the wide variety of topics covered, but also related to the different structures of the degree programmes involved. Of the two, History had to face most challenges – or they were documented best. From the very start the subject area group of History faced two major issues: the position of the final thesis and the position of minor subjects/subsidiary courses in the ECTS Pilot Programme. After years of debate in the many subject area group meetings, it was decided in 1993 to set up a special working group to come up with clear proposals and feasible solutions. Given the fact that both topics had and continue to have a much wider connotation than one subject area, it seems useful to offer some insight into the issues at stake and the solutions found.

The key question discussed was whether thesis work could be part of a mobility period. And, if so, how then should the responsibility for supervision and assessment be organized? It was established that the thesis was the most important examination in most degree programmes in the subject area of History. However, in Spain it was part of post-graduate studies preparing for a PhD and in the UK and Ireland –having the bachelor-master structure– limited as a mandatory element to the MA. In Flanders-Belgium, its preparation was spread over two years. The student workload proved to differ in Europa between 4 months and 6 month of study, that is 20 to 40 ECTS credits. In some cases, it took students ten months to prepare and complete their thesis. It was also noted that the level of required scholarship differed between countries and institutions. Nevertheless, the working group was able to formulate common indicators. It was agreed that each student before graduation should be able “to write, quite

⁴⁹ Transfer of Grades between institutions in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell on behalf of the ECTS working group of grade conversion, 1992. R. Wagenaar represented the SACs in the working group.

independently, a scholarly work of substantial length within a given period of time". The dissertation or final thesis should be characterized by: four elements: 1. The interpretation of source material, which enables the historian to see more than the layman by using –depending on the topic– primary and/or secondary sources; 2. Contextualizing of information, a clear definition of the problem covered, good knowledge of relevant literature and familiarity with existing theories; 3. Transmission of the views obtained in lucid and unambiguous language; and 4. The possibility to test the thesis by means of the critical apparatus. In other words, the purpose of the final thesis was executing scholarly research under supervision.⁵⁰

It was concluded –as a principle– that the preparation of the final thesis was allowed in the framework of a student mobility programme. Therefore, this option should be included in the Information Package. Although flexibility in facilitating the preparation of the final thesis was highlighted, also a set of basic rules were formulated which would meet the wider ECTS rules. This implied that it had to be explicitly included in the Learning Agreement. It should only be allowed when the Learning Agreement also contained regular lecture and/or seminar courses to be completed successfully. Seven basic rules were defined of which the most important were that thesis writing is carried out according to the rules of the host institution and the number of ECTS credits is according to the number included in the degree programme of that host institution. Furthermore, it was stated that supervision was the prime responsibility of the host institution, but co-supervision of home and host was an option. As a consequence a successful completed thesis should be recognized by the home institution as part of its degree programme. It was also mentioned that the language requirements of the host institution should be respected.⁵¹ The set of rules, including arrangement for re-sits, developed in the context of the Pilot as an «educational action research» project, are still valid today.

As difficult to solve by the Subject Area Group proved to be the issue of minor subjects and subsidiary course units. It was established that all History programmes had a mandatory part to be spent on non-history course work. However, the time reserved in the curricula for either minor studies or subsidiary course units varied from 12 to 50%. This implied that limiting the student exchange period to Histo-

⁵⁰ Report on the Position of the Final Thesis in the ECTS Pilot Programme. European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Subject Area: History. Ref. no. 058a.93/ECTS, dd. October 1993 / R. Wagenaar, SAC for History.

⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

ry courses meant a real obstacle for organizing a useful study programme abroad. It has to be taken into account that the mobility period of the vast majority of students in the ECTS Pilot Scheme was 10 months, a full academic year. Nowadays, after higher education institutions introduced the semester structure to facilitate large-scale mobility, most students spend only five months abroad. The main argument in the report of the working group for including non-History courses was «to improve the general knowledge of students and to maximize the chances to find a position on the labour market». During the first four years of the Pilot the approach of the institutions had been quite different, ranging from taking non-History courses as normal practice to not allowing it at all. The working group suggested a «very lenient approach». This had far reaching consequences because it meant that also ECTS credits had to be allocated to minor programmes and subsidiary courses in a systematic way which implied making other departments (not involved in the Pilot) acquainted with the ECTS «mechanisms».⁵²

Also in this case the working group defined additional rules to be respected, such as the inclusion in the Information Package of a statement that minor subjects / subsidiary course units could be taken, plus a list of available course units of this type. The Information Package should also contain a description of the position and size of non-History course units in the curriculum. The limit of these course units was set at a maximum of 50% and they should be made explicit in the Learning Agreement. The report was very much welcomed by the Subject Area Group.⁵³ It is no coincidence that two universities participating in the subject area of History, Deusto Bilbao and St. Andrews, took the lead in finding a more robust solution by publishing an Information Package for their complete institution. This implied allocating ECTS credits to all course units. This initiative took the European Commission by surprise. The first edition of their Institution-wide Information Package was published for the academic year 1994-1995. The University of Pisa, also a member of the History group, followed one year later. It proved inspirational for other institutions.

⁵² Report on the Position of the Minor Subjects/Subsidiary courses in the ECTS Pilot Scheme. Ref.no. 063a93/ECTS, d.d. October 1993/R. Wagenaar, SAC for History.

⁵³ European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). History Network 1989-1995. Minutes of the Autumn Meeting of the Subject Area Group of History. Alcalá de Henares, 5 November 1993.

How different is the situation today, when universities have even defined a policy where recognition of course work taken abroad is limited to electives and minors.

The examples of subject related issues, although being crucial for implementing the Pilot Scheme at subject area level, must be seen as ancillary arrangements. That is agreements made among the partner institutions themselves, during and after the pilot phase, in order to smoothen mobility and facilitate recognition in a given, subject-specific context. Such ancillary arrangements are not part of the ECTS credit system *sensu stricto*. The solution described above, with maximums for minor subjects / subsidiary courses, is an example of such an ancillary arrangement. Very useful and sensible, a good practice, potentially even transferable to other partnerships in other subject areas and contexts, but *not* a key feature of ECTS.

In the years to come, the mistake was often made not to make a distinction between ECTS as a credit system and the, highly valuable, ancillary arrangements. It would lay at the basis of many unnecessary debates on the functioning of ECTS and has even led to the establishment of a parallel and superfluous credit system for vocational education and training, European Credits for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), which is discussed further on.

Extension of the Pilot Scheme

When the reports of the History group on the final thesis and minor subject/subsidiary course units were prepared and accepted, the ECTS Pilot Scheme had already entered into a new phase, both in terms of the numbers of institutions involved and its mobility arrangements. In 1991 the Commission felt it was necessary to widen the basis for testing the functioning of the credit mechanisms by involving more institutions. In two steps (September 1991 and March 1992) the Inner Circle was extended with more European Communities universities and by involving universities from the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) from 84 to 122 to 145 members. For the first step –the extension of the European Community countries– 120 applications were received. Based on an application procedure again, the selection was made by the coordinating team, with an important say of the five subject area coordinators. The new institutions were spread over the five subject areas, their number growing from 17 to 29 on average. While the old Inner Circle institutions continued to receive a grant of 10.000 ECU in 1992 to fund the additional activities,

the starting grant for the newly admitted institutions was set at 15.000 ECU. The number of full student grants allocated to each institution was increased from five to ten with the aim «of stimulating new flows and interactions within ECTS». At the same time, the level of the grant was equalled to the grants awarded by the National Agencies (NGAA) to regular ERASMUS mobility students.⁵⁴

The first meeting for the newly admitted universities (36 plus two higher education institutions from the five New Länder of Germany) was the Fourth Plenary, which took place in Thessaloniki (30 November – 3 December 1991). For the EFTA universities the Fifth Plenary meeting in Toulouse (24-28 October 1992), would be their only opportunity to see all five Subject Area Groups operating in conjunction. However, two representatives from each EFTA country already attended the Thessaloniki meeting as observers. While the Thessaloniki meeting focused mostly on administrative aspects, improving mobility arrangements and the transfer of grades, and again taking place in a positive atmosphere, the Toulouse meeting was much more political, and the mood was accordingly. The Commission took much time to explain its policies and the rest of the first day was devoted to the future of ECTS. This came at a moment that the number of Inner Circle institutions had grown with nearly 60%. Although not an objective in itself, the number of mobilities had grown gradually during the Pilot phase:

1989 – 1990: 553
1990 – 1991: 810
1991 – 1992: 928
1992 – 1993: 1700
1993 – 1994: 1850
1994 – 1995: 2054

This meant a growth from 6.6 students on average in the first academic year to 14.2 on average per institution in the final year, with the number of student grants doubling in 1992-1993.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991. ERASMUS Programme*. SEC (92) 796 final. Brussels, 30 June 1992, 21-22; Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1992. ERASMUS Programme*. COM(93) 268 final. Brussels, 25 June 1993, 18.

⁵⁵ Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report ERASMUS Programme 1990/91* (SEC (91) 902 final), Brussels, 22 May 1991, 12; Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991 ERASMUS Programme* (SEC (92) 796 final), Brussels, 30 June 1992, 21; Commission of the European Communities, *Report form the*

In the 1991 Annual Report on the ERASMUS Programme the Commission correctly stated that «language remains the most influential criterion on selection of the students: the United Kingdom and France remain the most attractive countries. However, the widespread endeavour within the ECTS pilot scheme to achieve more balanced student flows can be clearly observed». This observation was underpinned with a table showing the student flows in the academic year 1990-1991. It also shows that countries with less-spoken languages (DK, GR, NL., PT) attracted fewer students. Those countries sent on average twice as many students than they were able to receive. The table concerning the academic year 1991-1992 offers a comparable picture.⁵⁶ This situation could not come as a surprise, but it nevertheless motivated the Commission to take a stand. At the end of the second day of the Toulouse Plenary after Commission senior staff, Domenico Lenarduzzi (Head of the Division responsible for the ERASMUS programme) and Angelika Verli-Wallace (Head of Unit responsible for ECTS) had returned to Brussels, an unexpected announcement was made. Policy officer Peter van der Hijden, who had joined the Commission ECTS unit a year earlier, was entrusted to inform the institutions that the Commission –not satisfied with the regional diversification– had decided to condition the institutional grant and the number of student mobility grants. Student grants (50/50%) and institutional grants (70%/30%) would be related to a wider distribution of student flows, especially to and from member countries with less-spoken languages. ECTS Inner Circle institutions would obtain more detailed information in December 1992.⁵⁷

This announcement came as a complete surprise also to the five Subject Area Coordinators. As a result the mood at the meeting was blackened, because what was intended as an «incentive» was perceived as «punishment» or even «blackmail». Besides severe protests at the meeting, tough letters were sent to the Commission by individual and combinations of universities. Universities even

Commission. ERASMUS Programme 1992. Annual Report (COM (93) 268 final), Brussels, 25 June 1993, 19, table XIII in annex; Commission of the European Communities, *Report from the Commission. ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1993* ((COM (94) 281 final). Brussels, 06-07.1994, 15; Commission of the European Communities, *ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1994* (COM (95) 416 final), Brussels, 08.09.1995, 10.

⁵⁶ Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991. ERASMUS Programme* (SEC (92) 796 final), Brussels, 30 June 1992, 22.

⁵⁷ ERASMUS Bureau, Fifth ECTS Plenary Meeting. Minutes. European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse, 25-27 October 1992 (ERAB/93/ECTS/Plenary Meeting/25-27 Oct 92/Minutes), 15.

threatened to withdraw from the Scheme. At the next coordinating meeting of Commission, ERASMUS Bureau and the Subject Area Coordinators, which took place in Brussels on 8-9 December 1992. the conclusion had to be drawn that the Commission had not done itself a service, and had lost trust, confidence and prestige among the participating institutions – institutions it depended on to make ECTS a success. In a circular letter dated 13 January 1993 a more careful approach was chosen.⁵⁸ Until the end of the Pilot Scheme the coordinating team and Subject Area Groups continued to have their regular bi-annual meetings, but no ECTS Plenary was ever organized again. This judgmental error of the Commission in using inappropriate pressure, however, did not change the general opinion of all involved higher education institutions that the ECTS Pilot Scheme had been a tremendous success. Overall, the «educational active research» approach had paid off.

From Pilot to main stream

Already half way the Pilot Scheme preparations were initiated regarding the scaling of ECTS. At the fifth and final Plenary Meeting, held in October 1992, the five subject area groups were invited to discuss the paper «Options for the future development of ECTS: generalization scenario's». The Commission offered two possible options: discipline-based networks and institution-based networks, but stressed it was open to any other proposals or alternatives. The responses of the five groups were mixed about the feasibility of further extension, although already after three academic years, in general, ECTS was thought to be sufficiently defined to make a next step. However, it was stressed that «although the system itself is mature enough, its generalization needs to be guided and supported in order to maintain the dynamism achieved until now and in order to maintain its unique character of being one commonly understood system applicable across various types of mobility». Therefore it was thought that generalisation of the process required a gradual approach, supported by an «intense and authoritative information campaign» in which the departments involved in the Pilot Scheme should play a substantial part. The suggestion in the paper that an Advisory Service would be required to «control» consistent implementation was broadly sup-

⁵⁸ Robert Wagenaar, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1992-1993 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. Groningen, 1993.

ported. In addition, it was suggested to set up national support services and a database and electronic communications network to fulfil information and communication needs of the generalized scheme.⁵⁹

This was according to the findings of the independent evaluation executed by the consulting firm Coopers & Lybrand commissioned by the European Commission, in which the opinions of the five Subject Area Groups were central, in particular in the chapter focusing on extending the use of ECTS. In addition, the report is based on a review of materials, including institutions annual reports as well as on face-to-face interviews of staff of 39 Inner Circle departments, the five subject area coordinators and –as a reference– interviews with 12 non-inner circle (outer circle and other) institutions. The report makes a distinction between fundamental principles and key mechanisms. As basic principle mutual trust is defined based on (1) transparency of curricula and academic procedures, (2) prior agreement between home and host institution on the course units to be confirmed and recognized and (3) the use of credit points to indicate the volume of learning. As key mechanisms it identified the credit system and the information package. The purpose of the evaluation was threefold: to assess the extent to which ECTS had achieved its aims in the pilot phase and –as it was at the time defined– would achieve these aims if generalized. And thirdly, «to identify implications for extending the use of ECTS, including any changes to, or developments of the current system which would be necessary or desirable».⁶⁰

In the final report published in February 1993 (a draft version was discussed by the coordinating team in December 1992), the «overall conclusion is that in the context of the pilot phase, ECTS has proved an effective means of facilitating academic recognition between higher education institutions in different European countries. Most of the institutions in the pilot were able to implement the ECTS key mechanisms (the credit point system and the information package) reasonably successfully ...». Regarding the wider use of ECTS, the firm concludes «that ECTS could be used more widely; and that no changes to the basic elements of the system (transparency, agreement

⁵⁹ ERASMUS Bureau, Fifth ECTS Plenary Meeting. Minutes. European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse, 25-27 October 1992 (ERAB/93/ECTS/Plenary Meeting/25-27 Oct 92/Minutes), 25-52.

⁶⁰ Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, *Evaluation of the pilot phase of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Final Report*. Brussels: Coopers & Lybrand, February 1993, 11, Executive Summary, section 10.

in advance and the credit point system) would be needed to facilitate its wider use».⁶¹ However, it also concluded that wider use would require more than just supplying information on the scheme. It suggested a more pro-active strategy explicitly showing the advantages of using ECTS for student mobility, underpinned by start-up funding for institutions to implement ECTS. Key questions raised in the report were (1) whether initial funding should be applied for supporting new partnerships or existing bilateral and multilateral ones and (2) whether the focus should be on the adoption of ECTS by individual departments or complete institutions. The authors of the report thought it more realistic to put the emphasis on individual departments because commitment was seen as a crucial pre-requisite for successful implementation. From these two questions a third derived: should funding be provided to individual institutions or to networks or departments? The former was suggested, because it was thought to also allow for preserving the benefits of the network approach. According to Coopers & Lybrand financial support should be limited to the start-up phase. It did not advise on the level of funding. It suggested to the Commission to investigate the feasibility to «copyright» ECTS, to «prevent bogus or dubious institutions using the ECTS name». Advice about ECTS should be dealt with by the ERASMUS Bureau, for academic judgment it was advised to contact a pilot institution in the same or related subject area and/or country/region.

The Commission did indeed give the report and its own paper «Options for the future development of ECTS: generalization scenario's», a follow-up. It chose a step-by-step approach which it thought would guarantee most success. In the first half of 1994 it launched a call for «proposing projects for the extension of the use of ECTS both within their own establishment» (higher education institutions) (by introducing ECTS in other subject areas) and within their cooperation partnerships, particular in the ICPs. According to the Commission, institutions responded «enthusiastically». With the support of an ad hoc working group of academics, the Commission assessed the proposals for funding at a meeting on 11-12 July 1994. An average amount of 13.000 ECU was made available to 143 institutions, using in practice the amount that had been reserved for the Pilot Phase in the previous years. The Commission expressed the intention to monitor this extension closely.⁶²

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, paragraph 17, 18 and 801-849.

⁶² Commission of the European Communities, *ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1994*. COM(95)416 final. Brussels, 8 September 1995, 10.

For this purpose a pilot project on «Quality Enhancement» was set up by the Commission in conjunction with the University of Strathclyde and together with a small group of ECTS experts for the period 1995/96.⁶³ During that period 21 site visits were made by pairs of experts. The project was coordinated by Richard Whewell and Suzanne Cyprès, the latter having extensive administrative experience in ECTS matters. She worked on ECTS at the ERASMUS Bureau from 1990, replacing in practice Mary O'Mahony, until its closedown in 1995. The purpose of the project was threefold: to verify the quality of implementation, measure the extent of problems associated with its implementation and the identification of good practices in finding solutions for any problems. The visits were highly appreciated by the universities involved.⁶⁴

As part of the dissemination strategy in May 1995 a new ECTS Users' Guide was published by the European Commission and prepared by the ERASMUS Bureau as one of its last activities. The opportunity was used to simplify the name from European Community Course Credit System to *European Credit Transfer System* and, as a result, doing better justice to its acronym ECTS. The format was an A4-binder which also included the «Directory of ECTS Users and their direct partners'. Although the format was not very practical, the examples of the detailed explanation of the Information Package and the different forms were, such as the Application Form, the Learning Agreement and the Transcript of Records in English, French and German. The Guide was printed in all European Communities languages.⁶⁵ Three years later a more user-friendly edition was published.

From the academic year 1996-1997 the focus would be on non-pilot scheme institutions for further extension. In a 2nd and 3rd round another 74 higher education institutions were selected for a Development grant, 38 universities and 36 «non-university institutions». The growing interest for applying ECTS as a recognition tool for academic studies can be digested from the applications for SOCRATES Institutional Contracts. The wider SOCRATES pro-

⁶³ The group consisted of the following members: Julia González (ES), Bertil Holmberg (SE), Michel Jouve (FR), Robert Wagenaar (NL), Richard Whewell (UK) and Suzanne Cyprès (BE). List of Counsellors Quality Enhancement in ECTS.

⁶⁴ Note «European Credit Transfer System. Quality Appraisal in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell, June 1997.

⁶⁵ European Commission DG XXII «Education, Training, Youth, *European Credit Transfer System. ECTS Users' Guide*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1995.

gramme, which ran from 1995-1999, had become the «new roof» of the ERASMUS programme. 772 new higher education institutions applied for a grant in their ERASMUS application for 1997-1998. One year later another 290 institutions did. They had reason to do so, because the application of ECTS was made conditional for obtaining mobility funding. With the outcomes of the pilot project «Quality Enhancement» in hand, Richard Whewell proposed to the Commission to establish a wider and sustainable «Quality Appraisal in ECTS» project which should be a combination of self-appraisal and site visits by ECTS counsellors. For this purpose fifty institutions were selected for a visit, which in practice was 25% of those who had obtained a Development grant, and were not visited as part of the pilot. It involved a Community budget of 300.000 ECU.⁶⁶

Those selected were officially informed by a letter dated 13 May 1997 from Domenico Lenarduzzi, director of Directorate A – Action in the field of education, implementation of SOCRATES. The letter offers insight into the thinking and strategy of the Commission. The Commission proved to be positively surprised by the number of responses, but it was also concerned about the integrity of the system. As a response, the letter announced a double policy: the organization of training seminars for those institutions selected to begin using ECTS that year and to send ECTS counsellors to those already participating in ECTS. The aim of the visit was defined as «to identify “reference” institutions in each country that will serve as examples for newcomers and collect examples of good practice». It was also stated that these counsellors could help to resolve practical problems and «to promote ECTS in those departments still reticent to using it». The Commission made it quite clear that it intended to protect the brand name ECTS by avoiding «the danger of a well-meaning but uninformed, inadequate, partial or even cavalier implementation of ECTS principles or mechanisms, which would create confusion and destroy the benefits of treating problems of academic recognition on a consistent, transparent basis with the use of commonly understood criteria». The Commission would compensate the institutions financially for the site visit.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Note “European Credit Transfer System. Quality Appraisal in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell, June 1997; European Commission, Selection Criteria for Establishments to be Visited in 1997/98 by ECTS Experts; Raimonda Markeviciene and Alfred Račkauskas, *ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. History, Implementation. Problems*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2012, 4.

⁶⁷ European Commission, Letter to the Rectors and Heads of institutions that will receive a visit of ECTS counsellors in 1997/9-1998. Brussels, 13 May 1997.

The visits required an expansion of the group of counsellors from six to twelve.⁶⁸ Besides the group of international counsellors, also national advisers were appointed in 1998, thus forming the ECTS Helpline network. Its members took care of organizing a large number of ECTS workshops. From 1998 the international group of counsellors would gradually expand further. In 1999 the group grew to 32 members, and was doubled one year later. In July 2000 the 64 members represented every EU country and all but one candidate countries.⁶⁹ In the academic year 1998-1999 another 50 site visits were organized and in the academic year 1999-2000 a 100 visits were made. For the visits an «ECTS Self-evaluation Questionnaire» was developed that made a distinction between the institutional and the departmental perspective. For reasons of consistency, also a «questionnaire for use on ECTS appraisal visits» was defined, to be used by the counsellors during the site visit. It covered the topics Information Package, institutional commitment and the student experience: application process, advice to students, the Learning Agreement, results for incoming students, results for outgoing students.⁷⁰

Although the activities look impressive, both in terms of the number of ECTS experts involved and the number of institutions that opted for ECTS implementation, the mood at the annual meetings of the international group of counsellors was not very positive.⁷¹ On the basis of the visits, the counsellors analysed that real penetration of the system and its philosophy at the level of the academic staff, was not taking place. ECTS remained mainly a reference system for student mobility handled by the International Offices of the HE institutions involved, as part of the Institutional Contract with the European Commission. As Raimonda Markevičienė and Alfred Račkauskas stated in their paper on ECTS in 2012: «by 1999 the ECTS was dying from lack of support on national and institutional levels as well as suffocating from narrow minded approaches to problems and im-

⁶⁸ Members of the counsellors group 1997-98: Richard Whewell, Volker Gehmlich, Poul Bonde, Julia Gonzalez Ferreras, Michel Jouve, Reinhard Schmidt, Robert Wagenaar, Estela Pereira, Bertil Holmberg, Esko Koponen, Carolyn Campbell, and Suzanne Cyprès. Invitation for counsellors meeting, Brussels, 7 July 1997.

⁶⁹ ECTS Counsellors – Address list, July 2000.

⁷⁰ Overview of institutions to be visited '98/'99; Overview of institutions to be visited 1999-2000. Questionnaire for use on ECTS Appraisal Visits; ECTS Self-Evaluation Questionnaire. All documents stored in Tuning Archive.

⁷¹ The following international counsellors meetings took place during the period 1997-2000: Brussels, 7 July 1997 (installing group); Florence, 16-17 October 1998, Aveiro, 9-10 July 1999 and Bilbao, 7-8 July 2000.

pacts student mobility brings to institutions».⁷² This judgment might be too negative, in general it expresses the concerns well. Anyway, the situation necessitated the Commission to set up the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. For this purpose it established a steering group on 24 February 1999 involving 19 representatives from university associations and networks, European employer organisations, National Agencies, Ministries of Education and the group of international ECTS counsellors and the European Commission. Its report prepared by the academics Volker Gehmlich (Fachhochschule Osnabrück) as chair and Stephen Adam (University of Westminster) as rapporteur, was published one year later in January 2000.⁷³

The main task of the steering group was to see how ECTS principles and approaches might facilitate the development of European life-long learning. In the terms of reference four topics were identified:

- Describing the «state of the art» of ECTS by focusing on results, strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for development
- Offering an overview of the legal situation regarding the recognition, training and professional achievement within the EU member states;
- Identifying the opportunities and barriers for developing an integrative common European credit framework derived from ECTS to facilitate credit accumulation in higher education, post-school adult and vocational education, different modes of education and professional education; and finally
- Design a pilot project to test the feasibility of developing ECTS as a system that compasses education, vocational training, and professional development and as a result promotes life-long learning.⁷⁴

⁷² Raimonda Markevicičienė and Alfred Račkauskas, *ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. History, Implementation. Problems*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2012, 5.

⁷³ *Report for the European Commission. ECTS Extension Feasibility Project*. January 2000.

Retrieved on 3 June 2018 from: https://media.ehea.info/file/BFUG_Seminar/96/8/ECTS_ext_feasibility_553968.pdf. Full report including appendixes to be found on EUCEN Observatory for Lifelong Learning (LLL) website: <http://lifelong-learning-observatory.eucen.eu/ectsextfp>. Retrieved on 3 June 2018. The membership of the Steering Group/Working Party is included in appendix 1, 27-28: <http://lifelong-learning-observatory.eucen.eu/sites/default/files/files/ann1ects.pdf>.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, Appendix 2 Project Terms of Reference, 30. Retrieved from: <http://lifelonglearning-observatory.eucen.eu/sites/default/files/files/ann2ects.pdf>

This proved to be a rather ambitious assignment. The core of the report is a description of the state of affairs in the membership countries. Although the report claims that it offers a summary of the current position of lifelong learning as described in country reports, in practice it limits itself to ECTS. This is no wonder because –as is correctly stated– there is no agreement yet what constitutes lifelong learning and the «development of integrated national systems for lifelong learning are in their infancy in Europe». Notwithstanding this, the ambition expressed in the Bologna Declaration (adopted only a few months after the steering group has started its activities) is that «Credits could also be acquired in non-higher education contexts, including lifelong learning, providing they are recognised by receiving Universities concerned». The authors of the report observe that there is an insufficient basis for incorporating vocational education and training in ECTS, due to differences in character between higher education and vocational education and training. These might be bridged in the future by focusing more on the outcomes of the learning process but these are hopes for the future. Interesting is also the notion of the main concern expressed in country reports, that is the misconception that «the introduction of credit accumulation creates an “*a la carte*” framework in which the student has complete freedom to mix credits/units (different types and levels of education) at will, and then demands a recognized qualification».⁷⁵

Another relevant observation in this context is that ECTS is workload-based and has to deal with differences in «notional time» in awarding credits. It is stipulated that «one year of study» involves considerable variations between countries. More sophisticated measures are thought necessary. It is also noted that the «current ECTS quantitative measure of credits needs to be supplemented by a more qualitative measure that emphasizes level, competencies and taught outcomes». In this respect the report states that «there was no agreement concerning the notion of levels within specific types of educational programmes. Some recommended the development of agreed European levels, whilst others rejected it». The wish was expressed that European agreement about levels would emerge. It referred in this context to initiatives taken in the UK where there is the «pioneering investigation and development of levels linked to outcomes: national generic (level) subject descriptors and national

⁷⁵ Idem, Quotes on page 6.

benchmark standards». In the conclusion it is stated that a «competencies-based approach to credits should be explored and tested to supplement the existing ECTS student workload-based approach». A definition thought «necessary for lifelong learning where learning is primarily based on the acquisition of skills and competencies». According to the authors the «current situation is that ECTS is an important but often peripheral activity of higher education institutions. The extension of ECTS to lifelong learning would require institutions to locate centrally the responsibility for co-ordinating their systems. It would become a core activity of many institutions».⁷⁶ These very important observations and suggestions did not receive a follow-up in the report.

Therefore, the two and half page long press release of the European Commission could not hide that the conclusions and recommendations were somewhat disappointing in terms of making next steps. The main strategy put forward was to develop a more comprehensive European credit-based system for lifelong learning by supporting a number of identified national pilot projects.⁷⁷ The problem here was its wide variation ranging from extension of ECTS in a particular field to accreditation related issues (including prior learning), work-based learning, science-based further education, to accumulation and a lifelong learning framework. In other words the steering group had not been able to find sufficient common ground for a well-defined single pilot project able to extend ECTS to a system covering both higher education and vocational education and training in a lifelong learning context.

What is most striking in both the report and the press release is that a lifelong learning framework and an over-arching European credit accumulation and transfer framework –evidently not being the same– are not clearly distinguished. In the report it is stated that «resulting diversity of (national) systems leads to the conclusion that (the latter) is needed now more than ever». It is stressed that ECTS is currently designed as a system to facilitate credit transfer, while a credit accumulation system requires that the students' entire educational programme is expressed in terms of credits, in which levels, progression and the academic coherence are more significant. The message is that it requires an evolvement of ECTS tools and procedures, which implies further development of its features and princi-

⁷⁶ Idem, 16-17, 21-22.

⁷⁷ European Commission, Press release ERASMUS. ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. Retrieved on 31 July 2000 from <http://europe.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/ectsext.html>. A printed version of this text stored in Tuning Archive.

ples. It is therefore remarkable that in the press release it is stated outright that «ECTS can easily be applied as an accumulation system but this will require appropriate support and guidance». A conclusion that could not be found in the report. Instead, the report concludes that the «development and introduction of an ECTS credit-based lifelong learning framework will be a complex process». It did not prevent the Commission to stipulate in the press release that the «creation of an effective pan-European credit-based framework for lifelong learning would benefit all European citizens». Since 2008 there is the *European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning*, initiated by the European Commission and founded on a Recommendation of the European Parliament, but it is not credit based. It shows that the political wish as expressed in the aim of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project was completely unrealistic.

Alongside the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project another project was initiated in 1999 which focused more in content on the implementation of ECTS, and in particular on the information aspect of it. The Commission went along with a proposal of Peter Blok of the University of Amsterdam to evaluate the quality of the ECTS Information Package as one of its key features. 900 eligible institutions were identified to have their Information Package evaluated by the national counsellors. For this purpose a «Checklist for the analysis of the ECTS Information Packages» was defined covering 20 items organized in two blocks: «General Information about the institution and department» and «Information about the curriculum and the course unit description». An Information Package understood as a course catalogue could and should be seen as a core element in a credit accumulation system.⁷⁸

It is therefore not by accident that Peter Blok and Stephen Adam in 1999 prepared a short paper for the *EAIE Forum* publication entitled «ECTS: from credit transfer to credit accumulation – a challenge for the 21st century».⁷⁹ They advocated an «evolution of ECTS into an overarching European credit framework», which was fully in line with the ambitions of the Bologna Declaration. Fritz Dalichow, who had left the ERASMUS Bureau in 1993 for the University of Derby, contributed to the same publication with the paper «CATS and EUROCATS». He suggested to integrate elements of the recent UK Credit Accumulation and Transfer

⁷⁸ Annual meeting ECTS Counsellors, Draft agenda, Aveiro, 9-10 July 1999. Invitation letter to participate as evaluator in project on Info Packs, prepared by Peter Blok.

⁷⁹ Stephen Adam and Peter Blok, ECTS: from credit transfer to credit accumulation – a challenge for the 21st century, in: *EAIE Forum*. Vol. 1. No. 3, Autumn 1999, 8-9.

System into a European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. This system should encompass all post-secondary education including continuing education and lifelong learning. As a key feature certification and crediting was foreseen per programme year. He pleaded for a «ladder of awards», after obtaining 60 ECTS credits the Certificate, after 120 ECTS the Diploma, after 180 ECTS the Bachelor, after 240 ECTS the Higher Diploma and Master after having obtained 300 ECTS. His proposal was current; it was student-centred, needs-oriented and flexible. In his own wording: «What is needed is EUROCATS. Let us look at it from the most important, the client's position, from the direction of «student empowerment». A student must be able to study at any time of his/her life at any place in Europe at any rate of study (full time, part time, present, distant, continuous, discontinuous) with efficient and transparent credit accumulation and full credit transfer/academic recognition whenever, wherever needed. EUROCATS would be able to fulfil these needs». Although it contains interesting elements, which will return in later discussions, his paper did not get a follow-up.⁸⁰

It had become obvious, that something else was required to position ECTS as the European credit system. A first step was a list of 19 «Questions and Answers» prepared by Stephen Adam in May 2000 as part of «The ECTS Extension», that is the spread of ECTS principles and practices to all programmes offered by higher education institutions and adopted by the team of ECTS counsellors. These were published in 2001 by the European Commission.⁸¹ The focus is on ECTS for accumulation. The question «Is it possible to use ECTS for accumulation?» is answered by stating that «in actual fact, transfer implies accumulation» when applied to all study programmes. The argument is made that the «EC(T)S» accumulation system will increase transparency, improve recognition, result in increased employability, flexibility, mobility, making a qualification more portable and mobile, facilitate collaboration and will contribute to the convergence of «educational structures» as agreed in the Bologna Declaration. In lifelong learning terms it will offer a framework for recording and recognizing learning. All these elements were to be incorporated in the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project, which was the actual follow-up of the discussions at the 7-8 July 2000 annual meeting of the ECTS counsellor group.

⁸⁰ Fritz Dalichow, CATS and EUROCATS, in: *EAIE Forum*. Vol 1. No. 3, Autumn 1999, 5-7.

⁸¹ European Commission, ECTS Extension «Questions and Answers». These were published on the «SOCRATES» pages, which do not exist anymore. Original text in Tuning Archive.

Moving towards a Credit Accumulation System

It was Julia González, who had been a member of the steering group of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project, who suggested at the July 2000 meeting held in Bilbao to limit the ambitions to the higher education sector and to find a more strategic approach by focusing on the outcomes of the learning process to facilitate mobility as well as recognition of studies. She proposed to set-up a project comparable to the ECTS Pilot Scheme focusing on five subject areas and take it from there. After some initial discussions in September and October 2000 on what such a project should look like, it was agreed with the European Commission to cover two lines: 1. To tune educational structures by defining commonly understood and accepted profiles and competences to be developed and 2. To reflect at European level on the issues debated at country level, including the measuring of student workload and its relation to learning outcomes in terms of knowledge, skills and competences». The first line is discussed at length in two chapters in the book *Reform!*, which has been published in parallel with this publication. Here, we concentrate on the second line. One of the four objectives defined for the Tuning project was the introduction of a common credit accumulation system by restructuring the transfer system. Involving around 100 academics in the Tuning project from a total of seven different subject areas, including a considerable number of ECTS counsellors, allowed for focusing on academic matters again instead of mainly technical aspects. It proved to be a brilliant move. In particular because the academics were not asked only to define the key competences for their subject area and to draw-up descriptors in terms of intended learning outcomes, but also to link these to ECTS credits. This offered the possibility to have in-depth discussions about what a European credit accumulation system should look like.

For that purpose three discussion papers were prepared on behalf of the Tuning Management Committee, which were presented under the heading «New perspectives on ECTS as an Accumulation and Transfer System»; two by Robert Wagenaar and another

by Stephen Adam. They proved to be of key importance for re-positioning ECTS. All papers were discussed in detail by the subject area groups before being finalized. Adam's paper focuses on the principles of a European credit accumulation framework, which he calls «good practice guidelines». Starting from the assumption that a «fundamental aspect of the “Tuning of Educational Structures in Europe” project is to aid the development of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) into an over-arching pan-European credit *accumulation and transfer* framework», he builds on the work done in the setting of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. Adam explains –in more general terms– the aims, the nature, the role of credits, levels and quality assurance in an overarching credit framework. He concludes that an effective system requires common principles and approaches to credits: «The more information and details that are given about the nature, context, level and application of credits, the more useful they become as a common currency for education recognition».⁸² This exactly is reflected in Wagenaar's contributions.

It cracks a number of nuts. The title of the first paper offers a clear direction of its objective, the linking of «Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits».⁸³ The items discussed are organized in 7 chapters which are all interrelated in understanding the phenomena of credits: (1) the role of credits; (2) allocation of credits to courses; (3) overall curriculum design(ing); (4) credits and level; (5) calculation of credits in terms of workload; (6) comparison of the length of academic years in Europe and, finally, (7) the relation between workload, teaching methods and

⁸² Stephen Adam, Principles of a Pan-European Credit Accumulation Framework: Good Practice Guidelines, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 215-222, quotes: 215, 221.

⁸³ The paper builds on a discussion paper prepared and circulated in September 2000 as well as on a preparatory meeting of ECTS experts in the Tuning Management Committee followed-up by an ECTS Counsellors meeting which both took place in Osnabrück on respectively 5 and 6-7 July 2001. A first draft of the paper outlined here was discussed by the Tuning Subject Area Groups at the 2nd Tuning project meeting (21-22 September 2001); a second draft was reflected upon at the 3rd Tuning project meeting (16-17 November 2001), the third –more complete draft– was discussed at the 4th Tuning project meeting (15-16 March 2002). The final paper was presented at the Closing Conference of Tuning Phase 1 in the European Commission Charlemagne Building on 31 May 2002. This version was published in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 223-246.

learning outcomes. The most important «nut» is the notion of *relative value* versus *absolute value* of credits. While for a transfer system the approach to apply that «credits allocated to courses are relative values reflecting the quantity of work required to complete a full year of academic study at a given institution» might be acceptable, for an accumulation system it is not. An accumulation system –to be accepted and feasible– requires a formal basis, that is the *absolute value* of credits. This implies that credits are no longer calculated on an *ad hoc* proportional basis, but on the basis of officially recognized criteria. The two most important ones: the agreed length of the academic year preferably captured in national law and the notion that credits are not an entity in itself, but «always describe work completed which is part of a curriculum».⁸⁴

The latter resulted in the principle that «a credit is a unit which reflects a certain amount of work successfully done at a certain level for a recognized qualification, implying that credits are not interchangeable automatically from one context to another». This amount of work is expressed in terms of time required by a typical student to complete a course unit successfully. Introducing this definition neutralized the fear that credit accumulation might lead to a «cafeteria model». It was also made clear again that credits are not based on the number of teaching hours nor on the complexity or importance of a topic. In other words: *credits per se* have only one dimension, that is student workload. This made it necessary to also link ECTS to the learning paradigm applied: teacher-centred or student-oriented. It is stipulated in the paper that the first model or system is «generally time independent, based on the assumption that the proper object of study is what the individual professor thinks the student should learn in his or her course». In the student-centred approach greater weight is given to «the design of the overall curriculum and focuses especially on the usefulness of study programmes for a future position of the graduate in society. With respect to this latter approach a correct allocation of credits as well as a sensible definition of learning outcomes play a decisive role».⁸⁵

This brings us to overall curriculum design on the basis of identified intended or desired generic and subject-specific competences formulated as learning outcomes, both at programme and at module/

⁸⁴ Robert Wagenaar, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 224-5, 228.

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, 231-2.

unit level. In this context, the paper mentions the option of modular and non-modular systems. Curriculum design is the bridge to another nut to crack: levels. In addition to a quantitative framework of credits it is though best –if not inevitable– to link credits to learning outcomes, defined as what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or is able to demonstrate after completion of a process of learning'. The paper pays tribute in this context to the work done by the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the organisations responsible for defining a Qualifications framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.⁸⁶ Learning outcomes add the dimension of level to credits, because together they allow for defining entrance and exit requirements for cycles, study years and course units. They also make it possible to develop cumulative programmes and/or identify progression routing.⁸⁷

The paper indicates the necessity of level descriptors or indicators and course *type* descriptors to be related to individual course units. It proposes a code system making a distinction between four levels –basic, intermediate, advanced and specialized and three types– core, related and minor (optional or subsidiarity).⁸⁸ Although the code system as such was never implemented, the notion of different types and levels kept playing a central role, in particular in defining level descriptors and indicators for both generic competences and subject-specific ones. This still is the case.

A final nut to crack was that of the role of «time» in the learning process. It proved to be the most challenging one. From the very start of the Tuning initiative, it was clear that it would be helpful to find common ground for solving the «time» issue. This required reliable information of the state of affairs in the different member countries. For this purpose questionnaires were prepared to gain insight into the length of higher education degree programmes for the subject areas involved in the project (in years and ECTS credits) as well as organization (undivided/semesters/ trimesters) and length –measured in terms of weeks– of the academic year. The length of degree programmes was the topic of the second paper prepared by Wagenaar. Whether meas-

⁸⁶ CQFW, NICATS, NUCCAT and SEEC, *Credit* and HE Qualifications. Credit Guidelines for HE Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. November 2001.

⁸⁷ Robert Wagenaar, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits, 237-238.

⁸⁸ This code system is based on a proposal of the EU Thematic «European Physics Education Network» (EUPEN).

ured in academic years or ECTS credits, it showed large variations between countries and disciplines, but also between programmes from the same subject areas taught in different countries. This was the topic to be solved by the Bologna countries together and a given for the Tuning project. In the paper a number of principles were outlined which would allow for a feasible two cycle system and the level of flexibility in terms of time to meet comparable learning outcomes.⁸⁹

Regarding the academic year a distinction was made in the Tuning surveys between the actual teaching periods and the preparation for and actual examination periods. The outcome of the survey was included as a table in two of the Tuning meeting documents, but in the end it was decided not to publish them.⁹⁰ It proved very difficult to obtain reliable data. In summary, the conclusion was that an academic year of a regular programme counted in the vast majority of countries 34 to 40 weeks. In terms of hours it was calculated that 1 ECTS credit point reflected 25-30 working hours. This was thought an acceptable range. In this context the notion of «notional learning time» was introduced, which was defined as the «number of hours which is expected a student (at a particular level) will need, on average, to achieve the specified learning outcomes at that level. It was acknowledged that the actual time spent would differ per student, because of many factors influencing the effectiveness of the learning process. Identified as factors were: diversity of traditions, curriculum design and context, coherence of the curriculum, teaching and learning methods, methods of assessment and performance, organization of teaching, ability and diligence of the student, and financial support by public or private funds.⁹¹

«Time» would become a topic of controversy in the years to come, in particular between the UK and continental Europe. It started with the argument made in Wagenaar's paper that if it was accepted that a «normal»/regular study programme should contain 36 to 40 weeks, there remained 10 weeks in which additional work could be done. For example in the setting of a Summer course, but also in case of so-called «full calendar year Master programmes» (of 12 months) as

⁸⁹ Robert Wagenaar, The Length of Higher Education Degree Programmes in Europe: Contribution to the Debate by the Tuning Project, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 247-251 and Appendix II Length of Studies, 301-316.

⁹⁰ Tuning Educational Structure in Europe. Meeting Document 2, Working Papers, 10-11.; Tuning Educational Structure in Europe. Meeting Document 3, Working Papers. Educational structures, Workload, Credits and Learning outcomes, annex 1, 13.

⁹¹ Robert Wagenaar, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits, 243.

developed in the UK and Ireland. From the perspective of fairness, such a programme could be allocated a maximum of 75 ECTS credits, equalling 46-50 working weeks. This position reflected the common opinion of the July 2001 ECTS counsellors meeting.⁹² This *communis opinio* would last long. In the meantime, British authorities and university leadership in particular (the Irish did not push the argument very much) claimed that the official length of their programmes was 1200 hours, which therefore allowed for three semesters of 600 hours each, making 1800 hours for a full calendar programme, which in their opinion equalled 90 ECTS credits.

The ECTS Counsellor Group and Tuning set the principle that the length of a 90 ECTS programme should be based on 14 study months (excluding holidays). By accepting the range of 25 to 30 working hours per credit, it was also agreed that an academic programme should imply 1500 to 1800 working hours. It was noted that the longest programmes in terms of hours were those in the natural sciences, engineering and medicine as a result of lab-related activities. The implication was clear: resulting from the UK position, 1800 hours could lead to a programme of 60 *and* of 90 credits. Although the efficiency argument as outlined above was accepted, this gap was perceived as simply too wide. The controversy obtained a new dimension when UK authorities and their universities claimed that in a learning outcomes based system, time was no longer a relevant factor. It was Stephen Adam who would become the advocate and spokesman of this argument. He would prepare a considerable number reports in the context of the official Bologna seminars. He could not hide however, that in official UK documents it was stated that an academic year in the UK contained 1200 hours. The UK credit system being based on the notion of 120 CATS, implied that one CATS equalled 10 student hours of work and 2 CATS therefore 20 hours, not fitting the ECTS range of 25-30 hours.

The UK approach implied that the learning outcomes of a UK full calendar Master programme would be comparable to three or even four semester European continental Second Cycle / Master programmes. The issue kept coming back in the following years. This is no surprise, given the fact that for British universities there was very much at stake, their budgets being highly dependent on overseas students and the attractiveness of the 12 months Master programme for those students.

⁹² Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Report of the meeting of the Management Committee in Osnabrück, Germany, 05/07/2001.

What became obvious was a completely different perception of and approach to the transformation of ECTS into an accumulation system. Experts focusing on lifelong learning used the accreditation of prior and experimental learning (APL/APEL) model as their main argument for neglecting the factor time. In those models the focus is on what has been learned, not on how it was learned and/or how long this learning required in terms of time. Tuning, instead, advocated first and foremost the implementation of ECTS as an accumulation system in the context of formal learning. Lifelong learning –which also may involve (recognition of) informal and non-formal learning– was thought to be of later concern. Taking lifelong learning as the argument for accumulation would jeopardize the chances of successfully introducing a European-wide accumulation system, it was thought, particularly, because recognition of studies taken at another institution had already proved to be a tremendous challenge since the launch of the ERASMUS mobility programme. Tuning also took seriously the expressed fear for introducing a cafeteria (à la carte) model, as had become clear in the preparation of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. For that reason, it was explicitly stated in Wagenaar's paper that «credits are not interchangeable automatically from one context to another». For a good understanding of the debate, at the time, both lifelong learning and APL/APEL were in their initial stage of development. The only country that was running a sophisticated system for recognition of prior and informal and formal learning was France.

Due to the fact that key ECTS international counsellors were included in the Tuning Management Committee or were participating as members of one of the Subject Area Groups, ECTS and Tuning operated in conjunction from 2001 onward. The interaction was even strengthened when the newly established European University Association (EUA) –resulting from the merger of the Association of European Universities (CRE) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors– took over the ECTS coordinating role from the University of Strathclyde starting with the academic year 2001-2002, some three months after the formal launch of the Tuning project. The coordinating role was taken up by Lesley Wilson, the EUA Secretary General, supported by the project manager, Sylvie Brochu. In February 2001 Ginette Nabavi, who had acted as the responsible European Commission policy officer since 1997, announced the Commission had decided to change its policies by limiting the number of the annual site visits to 50 again and to offer more support to the National

Helplines installed at the end of 2000.⁹³ These helplines, which were coordinated at the request of the European Commission by Volker Gehmlich of the Fachhochschule Osnabrück, were also the coordinators of national counsellor teams. The appointment of 30 national coordinators mid-2002 was thought necessary following the expansion of the group of counsellors to 80 when they met for their annual meeting in Graz on 6-7 July 2002.⁹⁴ The tasks of the counsellors from then on also included the promotion of the Diploma Supplement.

In April 2001 Peter van der Hijden took over the position and role of Nabavi. As a consequence, he also became the contact person for Tuning. He soon started with the preparation of a new information campaign, which was launched on 1 December 2002. Five «special measures for the promotion of ECTS» were identified in a paper distributed to the higher education sector: (1) an ECTS introduction grant for institutions which were newcomers to ECTS; (2) an ECTS label for institutions «which apply ECTS the proper way in all first and second cycle programmes»; (3) an ECTS Credit Accumulation Grant for institutions which have the ECTS label and wish to introduce mechanisms for credit accumulation (credits for lifelong learning); (4) ECTS/DS Counsellors for offering advice; (5) ECTS/DS Counsellors site visits to selected institutions.⁹⁵

One of the objectives of this information campaign was to give momentum to the first official Bologna «Seminar», dubbed conference, organized by the EUA in October 2002, of which the topic was «Credit Transfer and Accumulation – the Challenge for Institutions and Students». The conference, which was a co-production of the EUA and the Swiss Confederation Conference and hosted by ETH Zürich, was organized in close cooperation with the ECTS counsellors group. Many counsellors would act as facilitator / presenter. The seminar could be perceived as a follow-up of the «Bologna International Seminar on Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems» organized in Leiria on 23-24 November 2000. The key note speakers at that seminar were Pedro Lourtie (rapporteur of the first Bologna Follow-up Ministerial Confer-

⁹³ E-mail Volker Gehmlich dated 17 November 2000.

⁹⁴ ECTS/DS Counselling and Site Visit Programme, Supported by the SOCRATES programme of the European Commission. Coordinated by the European University Association (EUA), ECTS/DS Counsellors' pool, 1st July 2002.

⁹⁵ European Commission, SOCRATES- ERASMUS. Special measures for the promotion of ECTS and DS. Brussels 2 December 2002; European Commission, SOCRATES – ERASMUS. Special measures for the promotion of ECTS and DS. Brussels, 2 December 2002. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EC%20doc%20on%20the%20promotion%20of%20ECTS-%20DS.1068807686692.pdf>

ence, held in Prague in 2001), Volker Gehmlich and Julia González. González presented Tuning for the very first time to a wider audience. In his report on the conference the General Rapporteur Stephen Adam notes that González convinced her audience that the project «would serve to refine and test all the problems and difficulties associated with developing ECTS as an accumulation system». Adam concludes that there was a «strong endorsement» of the proposed Tuning project.⁹⁶

At the Graz meeting of July 2002 it was decided to set up a small key group coordinated by Robert Wagenaar to come up with new ECTS features.⁹⁷ The plan was to discuss and validate them at the first meeting of National coordinators scheduled for 8-9 November 2002. At the beginning of September the EUA asked Wagenaar whether these could already be made available for the Zürich conference to take place on 11-12 October 2002.⁹⁸ It took 7 versions to arrive to an agreed text to be distributed at the Conference.⁹⁹ It would serve as the core of its «Conclusions and Recommendations for Action». The report distinguishes ECTS as a transfer system (facilitate transfer and recognition and promote key aspects of the European dimension of higher education) and an accumulation system (supports widespread curricular reform in national systems, enables widespread mobility, facilitates lifelong learning and recognition of informal and non-formal learning, promotes flexibility in learning and qualification processes, facilitates access to the labour market and enhances the Bologna objective transparency and comparability of European systems and promotes the attractiveness of European higher education towards the rest of the world). It identifies as the key goals of ECTS to improve transparency and comparability of study programmes and qualifications and to facilitate mutual recognition of qualifications.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Stephen Adam, International Seminar Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems, Leiria 23-24 November 2000. Report of the General Rapporteur. See also: EHEA website, Work Programme 1999-2001. International Seminar on Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems. Bologna Seminar Leiria, Portugal 24/11/2000 – 25/11/2000. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100286/seminar-on-credit-accumulation-and-transfer-systems.html>

⁹⁷ Besides Robert Wagenaar, the members of the group were Volker Gehmlich, Stephen Adam, Julia González and Maria Sticchi-Damiani.

⁹⁸ E-mail from Sylvia Brochu on behalf of Lesley Wilson to Robert Wagenaar, dated 6 September 2002.

⁹⁹ E-mail from Robert Wagenaar to the EUA representatives and the members of the working group of national counsellors, dated 8 October 2002.

¹⁰⁰ European University Association, Credit Transfer and Accumulation – the Challenges for Institutions and Students. EUA/Swiss Confederation Conference. ETH

Besides outlining the objectives, the report identifies 8 key features of which the most important is: «ECTS is a student-centred system based on the *student workload* required to achieve the objectives of a programme. These objectives are preferably specified in terms of *learning outcomes*». Also two other features included are of crucial significance for the notion of making ECTS an accumulation system: (1) ECTS are used to describe entire study programmes on the basis of their official length; and (2) credits are not automatically interchangeable from one context to another. They can only be used to obtain a recognized qualification when they constitute an approved part of the study programme». ¹⁰¹ It is obvious that both the objectives and the key features were very much in line with the Tuning project.

It is interesting to note that in the key features, as presented in the conclusions, the range of hours linked to one ECTS credits is absent. This was the result of severe lobbying of the British participants at the meeting. They met separately during the meeting to organise their position. At the concluding session this became very visible, as one UK speaker after the other took the floor to stress that «time» was an insignificant factor for a system based on learning outcomes in a lifelong learning context. It showed very clearly to all 330 participants of the seminar that the UK higher education sector had something to lose and would go to any length to defend the 180 CATS / 90 ECTS full-year master programmes. Although relevant to highlight because of the discussions to come, more important were the EUA recommendations as an outcome of the seminar. The EUA members were asked to «commit themselves to implementing ECTS in line with the objectives and key features outlined in this document» and to «ensure that they are fully aware of the potential of ECTS for supporting curricular reform». ¹⁰² In retrospect this seminar on ECTS proved to be one of the most crucial official seminars that took place, and comparable in importance to the ones on the (length of the) Bachelor degree and the Master degree.

That the issue of time continued to be a hot potato for the UK can be derived from the fact that Adam and Wagenaar were invited at Universities UK headquarters in London on 13 June 2003 for a discussion on «The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System» in the setting of the EWN

Zürich, 11/12 October 2002. Conclusions and Recommendations for Action. Brussels, December 2002, 2. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/events/past/2002/Autumn-Conference-2002.aspx>

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, 2-3.

¹⁰² *Idem*, 3-4.

Credit Forum. It was a follow-up of a SEEC Conference¹⁰³ that had taken place on 21 March 2003 at which both ECTS counsellors / Tuning representatives had given a key note. The other key notes were delivered by the president of Universities UK, Roderick Floud and by Paul Bridges, Chair of Northern Universities Consortium for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (NUCCAT).¹⁰⁴ In this context it is also interesting to note that Universities UK prepared a special briefing for UK participants of the second EUA Convention of European higher education institutions, that had taken place the previous month. One year later these initiatives got a follow-up in the paper *Master degrees and the Bologna Process*, prepared by the Europe Unit of Universities UK. It offers additional arguments in favour of the 12 months Master degree. The paper was meant for Vice Chancellors, Principals, European and International Officers.¹⁰⁵

The debate on the role and position of ECTS was reflected in the Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for higher education, resulting from their meeting in Berlin on 19 September 2003. It shows full support for the initiatives to transform ECTS: «Ministers stress the important role played by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development. They note that ECTS is increasingly becoming a generalised basis for the national credit systems. They encourage further progress with the goal that the ECTS becomes not only a transfer but also an accumulation system, to be applied consistently as it develops within the emerging European Higher Education Area». Furthermore, they asked those working on the development of qualifications frameworks for the European Higher Education Area «to encompass the wide range of flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of the ECTS

¹⁰³ Established in 1985, originally SEEC stood for the «South East England Consortium for Credit Accumulation & Transfer», it has grown to cover institutions across the south and midlands although events are primarily held in London.

¹⁰⁴ EWN Credit Forum. Meeting with ECTS Counsellors to discuss: The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. Board Room Universities UK, Woburn House, 13 June 2003; Report of the SEEC Conference. Prepared by Sarah J. Gershon, Vice-Chair SEEC, 24 March 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Universities UK, *The second convention of European Higher Education Institutions: Briefing for UK Higher Education Institutions. 29-31 May 2003, Graz*. In particular the part on «ECTS and the Tuning project», 36-38, paragraphs 122-134. This document was especially prepared for the UK participants of the EUA Graz Convention. It also announced a 75 minutes preparatory meeting for these participants; Europe Unit of Universities UK, *Master degrees and the Bologna Process*, London, 13 July 2004.

credits». This again was related to another wish –inspired by the Tuning project– «to describe qualifications in terms of workload, level, learning outcomes, competences and profile».¹⁰⁶

Notwithstanding the UK lobby, at the meeting of national ECTS/DS counsellors taking place in November 2002, one month after the Zürich Conference, the range of number of hours of an academic year, 1500-1800 hours, that is 25-30 hours per ECTS credit was included in the key features again, accompanied with the phrase «in most cases». This did not come as a surprise because it was the common denominator resulting from a short survey carried out by EUA in co-operation with the ECTS/DS national coordinators, produced for the Zürich Conference. It has to be stated here, however, that for most countries the number of hours of an academic year /the number of hours per ECTS credit was not (yet) included in national legislation in 2002.¹⁰⁷

Having reached agreement on the key features of an ECTS transfer and accumulation system by making the awarding of ECTS credits dependent on the achievement of the defined learning outcomes, the group of national counsellors started working on a new edition of the ECTS Users' Guide. At that time, it had already been decided to keep ECTS as the acronym for reasons of continuity and branding. From 2002 ECTS would stand for *European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System*. With the objective in mind that the next Users' Guide should be a help for implementation and should therefore also offer precise guidance and include «Frequently Asked Questions», it took about one and a half year to complete. Its preparation involved many national counsellors and five seminars / meetings, including two annual ones for all counsellors (Antwerp, Bilbao and Wroclaw in 2003, Letterkenny and Debrecen in 2004). The final editing was done by Ann Katherine Isaacs and Robert Wagenaar, which again showed the overlap with Tuning.¹⁰⁸ The Tuning influence can be derived from the fact that the concept of competences was introduced in relation to learning outcomes. But also in other Tuning materials which were in-

¹⁰⁶ Berlin Communiqué 2003 -, «Realising the European Higher Education Area». Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Higher Education on 19 September 2003. Berlin, 2003.

¹⁰⁷ European University Association (EUA), *ECTS Counselling and Site Visit Programme. The state of implementation of ECTS in Europe. A short survey carried out by EUA in co-operation with the ECTS/DS national coordinators*. Brussels, 2002.

¹⁰⁸ The final responsibility for the content of the Users' Guide was with Peter van der Hijden, representing the European Commission. Ann Katharine Isaacs was (and is), besides counsellor for Italy, co-coordinator of the Tuning Subject Area Group for History.

egrated in the ECTS Guide such as the chapter on student workload, in which its calculation is described on the basis of the four step approach developed by Tuning, and the relation between competences and learning outcomes.

The ECTS Users' Guide 2004/5 was published on the website of the European Commission in a downloadable format. The key features of the now «European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System» were made available in the same year in a nine pages official publication of the European Commission.¹⁰⁹ The 2004/5 edition would be replaced five years later. During this time span a lot happened and was discussed in relation to ECTS, but this had a limited effect on the essence of its key features, as can be concluded from the overview «ECTS Key Features over time», included as an annex to this book.

Bologna Process context

For obvious reasons a number of conferences were organized –in particular in the UK– to highlight and promote the use of learning outcomes in the educational process. The one that obtained most attention was the official United Kingdom Bologna Seminar, entitled «Using Learning Outcomes». The seminar took place in Edinburgh on 1-2 July 2004 and attracted 150 delegates from 26 Bologna countries. As input for the seminar a background paper was prepared by Stephen Adam, which he presented at the seminar.¹¹⁰ In the paper he showed an overview of activities related to the learning outcomes approach in the different Bologna countries based on information obtained from the 40 members of the Bologna

¹⁰⁹ European Commission, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Key Features. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004. ISBN 92-894-4742-7. The publication can be approached from: <http://net-ceng.eu/downloads/useful-information/ECTS%20Key%20features%20-%20EN.pdf>. This publication included the website of the ECTS Users' Guide: http://Europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/Socrates/ects_en.html. This website is no longer active since the termination of the Socrates Programme, which was followed-up by the Lifelong Learning programme. A print of the Users' Guide 2004 is kept in the Tuning Archive.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Adam, *Using Learning Outcomes. A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing «learning outcomes» at the local, national and international levels*. United Kingdom Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh Conference Centre) Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2004. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: http://media.ehea.info/file/Learning_Outcomes_Edinburgh_2004/76/8/040620LEARNING_OUTCOMES-Adams_577768.pdf. Among the speakers, the ECTS/DS Counsellors Julia Gonzalez, Richard Whewell and Robert Wagenaar. See programme, retrieved on 18 June 2018: http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/programme.pdf

Follow-up Group (BFUG) and some 100 ECTS/DS counsellors. He summarized the information in a snapshot which showed initiatives –varying from small to large– in 28 countries. He noted activities in 97% of the EU countries.¹¹¹ His overview reflects the mood of the time well, but it was not necessarily a realistic overview. The main conclusion that was drawn from the seminar suggests that the BFUG «could take a lead role in ensuring coherence across the different strands affected by learning outcomes: in particular the relationship between ECTS and qualifications frameworks, Tuning, Diploma Supplements, and quality assurance, and more broadly between the Bologna and Copenhagen processes».¹¹² This was one of the seminars that offered input for the Ministerial Bologna Follow-up Conference 2005 to be held in Bergen, Norway. ECTS does not appear once in the text of the Communiqué. However, it is stated in the text that «We adopt the overarching framework for qualifications in the EHEA, comprising three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the first and second cycles».¹¹³

The inclusion of «credit ranges» in both the framework and the Communiqué proved not to be self-evident. In a letter to the BFUG, dated 4 March 2004, the EUA on behalf of the ECTS National Coordinators asked to ensure that their work done hitherto on ECTS would feed into discussions of the «EQF», to ensure «consultation of the ECTS counsellors and their inclusion in the structures being established» and to «ensure that the «outcomes of the ECTS counsellors» discussion on the link between credits and levels (...) are included in the envisaged EQF project». For this purpose an EUA working group on «ECTS, levels and the European Qualifications Framework» was established, consisting of 7 counsellors.¹¹⁴ The letter was timely, because at the end of March 2004 the «working group on an overarching framework of qualifications for the

¹¹¹ Stephen Adam, Power Point Using Learning Outcomes, slides 12-14. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: http://aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/S_Adam_Bacgrerep_presentation.pdf

¹¹² UK Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004. Report for BFUG. Prepared by Ann McVie on behalf of the UK Seminar Organising Committee. September 2004. Retrieved on 18 June from: http://www.aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/11_03_Edinb_Report.pdf

¹¹³ Bergen Communiqué 2005 –The European Higher Education Area – Achieving the Goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005.

¹¹⁴ The working group consisted of the following members: Stephen Adam (UK), Paul Bonde (DK), Danny Brenna (IRL), Andrejs Rauvargers (also a formal member of the

EHEA» as well as the terms of reference were established. Its six country representatives would be supported by «technical expertise». As an outcome of the meeting of the EUA working group on levels on 19 May 2004, the EUA and national ECTS counsellors came up with a firmly formulated recommendation «regarding the role of ECTS in the elaboration of a «European Qualifications Framework». It had 13 points. The key message was that the overarching framework should be ECTS credit-based. In other words it should be a «Credit and Qualifications Framework». Furthermore, it expressed the need «for a further subdivision of the existing Bologna 3 cycles into “sub-levels” in order to cover progression through the higher education system» and stated that the «use of credits permits the necessary articulation between sub-levels and cycles each with their own specific learning outcomes».¹¹⁵

The message did not land, due in particular to opposition from the UK members of the group, which made up half of the experts/consultants. The BFUG working group would meet 6 times. After the fourth meeting the EUA concluded that the recommendations were not taken on board. It asked Wagenaar to represent the organization at the last two meetings. The outcome of coordinated action at the fifth meeting, which took place in Budapest in the autumn of 2004, resulted in the inclusion of credit ranges for the first and second cycle in the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA.¹¹⁶ The integration of sub-levels was a bridge too far.

The annual meeting of the ECTS/DS counsellors, held in Debrecen on 9-10 July 2004 meant the end of an era. In the spring of 2004 the Commission proposed to turn the ECTS/DS counsellors into Bologna promoters, that is to broaden their tasks to cover all agreed Bologna action lines. The BFUG agreed with this proposal on the condition that the national teams would operate under supervision of the national authorities. This included the selection and appointment of members of the teams, although the European Commission was expected to continue to finance their activities. The European Commission, represented by director David Coyne accepted this

BFUG EQF working group) (LV), John Reilly (UK), Maria Sticchi-Damiani (IT), Robert Wagenaar (NL) and the representatives of the EUA Lesley Wilson and Sylvie Brochu.

¹¹⁵ Recommendation from EUA and the national ECTS counsellors regarding the role of ECTS in the elaboration of a European Qualifications Framework. Brussels, 23 June 2004.

¹¹⁶ Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, February 2005.

condition astonishingly easily. The setback was that in a number of countries the counsellors / experts were (partly) replaced after a selection process in which relevant expertise was not the decisive condition for appointment. It meant a reduction in the effectiveness of the teams in those countries. Around the same time, the European Commission decided to stop financing Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs). Its effect was a substantial weakening of the European Commission's position in steering the modernization process for higher education, because it cut the direct link with the academics in the field. The academics directly involved in the modernization process perceived this as a strategic mistake of the highest order which is still greatly regretted.

Challenging the ownership

After the Bergen Ministerial meeting, the UK took over the Secretariat of the BFUG from Norway to prepare for the next Bologna Follow-up meeting to be held in London in 2007. In these years activities concentrated on the development of national qualifications frameworks. It was also the period in which the European Commission took the initiative –with the Copenhagen Process in mind that focused on the VET sector– to set up the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (EQF for LLL) which intended to cover all learning. As members of the working group to develop the EQF were appointed as representatives for the higher education sector: Mogens Berg, Stephen Adam and Robert Wagenaar, who all three had been –in different roles– part of the BFUG working group responsible for the QF for the EHEA. Their efforts to make the EQF credit based, were not successful. This was not because the VET sector was a priori against credits, but it did not enthusiastically embrace ECTS – on the contrary.

To the surprise of the ECTS counsellor group, the Commission at this time started the development of a credit system especially meant for the VET sector: the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). It received the blessing of the European Parliament and the Council in 2009 when a Recommendation was passed.¹¹⁷ Recommendations are not binding acts. They intend to offer guidance to

¹¹⁷ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (Text with EEA relevance) (2009/C 155/02). Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF>

the EU countries for policy-making. It came one year after the adoption of the Recommendation to establish the EQF for Lifelong Learning. In the «recommendation» on ECVET, the system is defined as «a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and, where appropriate, accumulation of individuals» learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. ECVET tools and methodology comprise the description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes with associated points, a transfer and accumulation process and complementary documents such as learning agreements, transcripts of records and ECVET users» guides'. Key are the concepts of «units» and «associated points». A unit is defined as «a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated with a number of associated ECVET points. According to the concept as included in the recommendation «ECVET points provide complementary information about qualifications and units in numerical form. They have no value independent of the acquired learning outcomes for the particular qualification to which they refer and they reflect the achievement and accumulation of units. To enable a common approach for the use of ECVET points, a convention is used according to which 60 points are allocated to the learning outcomes expected to be achieved in a year of formal full time VET».¹¹⁸ The double emphasis on learning outcomes and formal time spent, demonstrates that ECVET and ECTS are in fact one and the same credit system.

ECVET points represented «a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification.» These points did not show up in its accumulation principle: «A qualification comprises in principle several units and is made up of the whole set of units. Thus, a learner can achieve a qualification by accumulating the required units, achieved in different countries and different contexts (formal and, where appropriate, non-formal and informal), while respecting national legislation relating to the accumulation of units and the recognition of learning outcomes». Having ECTS already in place and with the intention to operate in a lifelong learning context a reference to ECTS could not be avoided: «This Recommendation should facilitate the compatibility, comparability and complementarity of credit systems used in VET and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System («ECTS»), which is used in the higher education sector, and thus should contribute to greater permeability be-

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem.*

tween levels of education and training, in accordance with national legislation and practice».¹¹⁹

The driving force behind establishing ECVET was the Frenchman Michel Aribaud. Like Peter van der Hijden who was responsible for ECTS, he was employed at DG EAC. Aribaud started his activities for ECVET in 2004.¹²⁰ In preparation of a credit system meant for the VET sector only, he attended a number of meetings of the ECTS counsellor group. It had not much effect. Central in the discussions that ECTS counsellors had with Aribaud was the notion that there was no need for ECVET, because ECTS principles were very well suited to also meet the needs of the ECVET sector. Having one system would also be in the interest of the EQF for Lifelong Learning. Although many of the elements of ECTS and ECVET were comparable and compatible, the sticky issue was the allocation of points to units. To establish the relative weight of a unit three factors were identified: (1) relative importance of the learning outcomes; (2) complexity, scope and volume of learning outcomes and (3) effort necessary for a learner to acquire the knowledge, skills and competences required.¹²¹

In fact these three factors are confusing reformulations of the ECTS credit definition with the double emphasis on learning outcomes and their associated workload. Already in the first years of the ECTS Pilot Scheme these kind of factors were perceived as arbitrary and therefore unworkable, as subjective and not quantifiable. However, observed with some intellectual distance, the reader will notice that the two credit systems ECTS and ECVET in its core are in fact one and the same.

David Coyne, Director for Lifelong Learning, Education and Training Policies at the Directorate General for Education and Culture realized that having two (competing) systems was not very helpful in practice. Not in the least for the VET sector. He showed

¹¹⁹ Idem.

¹²⁰ Background Michel Aribaud. Before joining the EC he was inspector in charge of Vocational education and training and head of the French Ministry of Education department «Validation des acquis de l'expérience (VAE)» (validation and recognition of achieved non formal and informal learning). Representing the French Government, he was a member of the Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer in VET that produced its *First Report on Credit Transfer in VET November 2002 – October 2003*, in 2003. Report retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/foko6_neues-aus-europa_o8_anlage.pdf

¹²¹ European Commission, DG Education and Culture, *The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), Get to know ECVET better. Questions and Answers*. Revised edition 2011. Brussels, 23.

both intellectual distance and engagement when in June 2005 he addressed the «Advisory Committee for Vocational Training», a tripartite body established in 1963 under the then Treaty establishing the Europe Economic Community. In doing so, Coyne, sensed his holistic (and historic) responsibility to help for citizens who want to engage in lifelong learning, not being bothered by artificial boundaries set up between general education on the one hand and vocational education and training on the other. He therefore proposed to the committee members to have one single European credit system for Lifelong Learning, which could even have a new name if that would help get all sectors on board. Suggested was «European Credit Transfer System for Lifelong Learning» (ELC). Unfortunately, the members, in particular the governments' group, of the Advisory Committee for Vocational Training did not grasp the historic opportunity they had to build a bridge between general education and vocational training. Instead, they choose to keep things separate and continue down the safe but unfruitful road of separate development.¹²²

Partly this was due to the set up and presentation of ECVET, not as a mere credit system, but as a vast and ambitious scheme that would solve all curricula, quality and recognition problems one could imagine existing in vocational education and training. A laudable goal (not unlike the ambitions of the Tuning Project in higher education), but this «catch all» approach, unfortunately, blurred the readability and effectiveness of ECVET as a credit system in the strict sense of the word. Over the years, credit points were played down in ECVET and it concentrated on the concept of

¹²² European Commission, DG EAC, Advisory Committee on Vocational Training. Meeting of 16 and 17 June 2005.

Minutes. CCFP_03 2005. Document obtained from the European Commission on request. It was in particular the German representative Peter Thiele on behalf of the Governments' representatives group who argued in favour of a separate VET credit strategy. The other two groups represented, «employers» and «workers» argued they could not oversee the consequences of developing a combined system, but did not take an explicit position. In its meeting of 13 December 2007 the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training delivered a positive opinion on the main elements of the proposal to set up ECVET. Commission of the European Communities, Recommendations of the European Parliament and the Council on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) [SEC(2008) 442 SEC(2008) 443]. Brussels, 9.4.2008 COM(2008) 180 final

2008/0070 (COD), 5. Retrieved 07-10-2018: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008PC0180&from=EN>

units. As a result ECVET no longer can be called a credit system, an opinion which seems to be shared by the European Commission according to a note which was sent in June 2016 to the ECVET stakeholders.¹²³

The disappointment about the Commission's ECVET initiative was not limited to the ECTS/DS counsellors group. The EUA was also not amused. It made it an issue in its *Lisbon Declaration of 2007, Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a common purpose*: «Universities strongly urge the European Commission to build on the achievements of ECTS in the further development of proposals for a credit system for vocational education and training (ECVET). Every effort should be made to avoid the existence of two separate credit systems within one lifelong learning strategy.»¹²⁴

In the years until the London Ministerial meeting (2007) ECTS did not receive much attention. None of the official Bologna seminars were devoted to the topic. When preparing the London Communiqué there was some excitement or rather agitation, when the UK tried to decouple learning outcomes from student workload, that is notional time. It did not find support among the other countries. The paragraph that was included in the London Communiqué of 18 May 2007, «Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world», reads «Efforts should concentrate in future on removing barriers to access and progression between cycles and on proper implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload.»¹²⁵ This did not mean the UK higher education sector gave up although it never intended to replace its own Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) by ECTS.¹²⁶ Universities

¹²³ European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Skills, Note to the ECVET Users' Group Members and the Coordinators of National Teams of ECVET Experts. Subject: Discussion on the future of ECVET. Brussels, 16 June 2016. In this note it is stated: «Even though ECVET was formally established as a credit system, the experience gained so far shows that: ECVET has not been used as a credit system that regulates the allocation and transfer of credit points which keep the same value across programmes and countries, which was also part of its initial objectives». Retrieved 06-10-2018: <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/3550/discussion-note-future-ecvet.pdf>

¹²⁴ European University Association (EUA), *The Lisbon Declaration Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a common purpose*. Brussels, 13 April 2007, item 8, 3.

¹²⁵ *London Communiqué of 18 May 2007, Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world*.

¹²⁶ See in this respect: Universities UK, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England. Final report of the Bur-*

UK claims in its Europe Note, published on 20 July 2009¹²⁷, that as a result of UK higher education lobbying, the European Commission agreed to review ECTS in 2007. It seems too much honour. Already in March 2007 the ECTS counsellors discussed updating the ECTS Users' Guide, including the reference to the (lengths of the) academic year. In June 2007 a new draft was discussed. It was decided to establish a small group to draft a one-page proposal for revised ECTS key features. The group consisted of six members, all of whom were critical of the British position.¹²⁸ This one page draft was finished mid-September 2007 and sent for consultation to the BFUG. The Group discussed the draft at their Lisbon meeting on 2-3 October 2007. This resulted in a list of comments, in particular from the UK representation, which were taken on board in the final version of the «ECTS Key Features» of 21 December 2007.¹²⁹

In the meantime the relations between the EUA and the vast majority of the national ECTS/DS counsellors deteriorated rapidly. At the Lisbon Bologna Follow-up Group meeting the EUA suggested to take the range of 1500 to 1800 hours out of the Key Features. This point of view came as a complete surprise, alien as it was to the position of the counsellors group. In addition, the EUA challenged the position of the European Commission as the institution responsible for ECTS. On 5 November 2007 it stated the following on its website:

«The EUA Council held an important discussion on the future development of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) during its meeting in Wroclaw, Poland on October 24th

gess Group. It contains an annex D, commissioned by the Burgess Group from the Europe Unit of Universities UK, entitled: «Note from the UK Higher Education Europe Unit: Guidance on articulation between the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and the UK's credit systems». London: Universities UK, December 2006, 40-48. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2006/proposals-for-national-arrangements-use-academic-credit-in-he-england.pdf>

¹²⁷ Europe Unit Universities UK, *Europe Note*, London 20 July 2009 meant for Vice Chancellors, Heads of Institutions, European/International Office and Academic Registrars. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report_July2009_UKHEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf

¹²⁸ Its members were all involved in the Tuning project: Volker Gehmlich, Maria Sticchi-Damiani, Raimonda Markeviciene, Julia González, Robert Wagenaar and Caroline Carlot (ESIB/ESU).

¹²⁹ Document ECTS Key Features (1 October 2007). The documents offers an overview of the draft key competences, the comments and amendments proposed and the reaction and conclusion proposed of the European Commission

2007. Currently the European Commission is undertaking a review of the ECTS reference documents (ECTS Key Features and Users' Guide) to bring them in line with developments in the Bologna Process and to make ECTS a more effective tool in the context of lifelong learning. The EUA Council emphasised that the voice of universities and students must be heard in this debate, as EUA has committed in the Lisbon Declaration that "*universities wish to take a leading role in the further development of ECTS*". This follows the findings of Trends V and Bologna with Student Eyes that, although ECTS is being increasingly used throughout Europe's universities, considerable difficulties are being experienced in the implementation of the system. (...) EUA is particularly concerned to ensure that clear guidelines are provided to universities both on the different purposes of ECTS, and on measures to ensure proper implementation. With such guidelines in place, universities will be able to take full responsibility for using the system well and for further developing it to respond to emerging challenges. EUA is thus fully committed to the development of this vital European credit system.¹³⁰

From the e-mail correspondence at the time, it can be learned that the message was not well received by the ECTS counsellors group, which the EUA expected to coordinate on the basis of a service contract of the European Commission following a call for an «information project on higher education reform». In its tender document, the EUA had stated that it «will work in partnership with EURASHE, ESIB, EAIE and Tuning».¹³¹ EUA's explicit request to the European Commission to take over the responsibility for ECTS was turned down by the Commission, as was to be expected. It was the second

¹³⁰ European University Association (EUA) Website, News page. Enhancing the implementation of ECTS, 5 November 2007. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/07-11-05/Enhancing_the_implementation_of_ECTS.aspx. See also the European University Association (EUA), *The Lisbon Declaration. Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a Common Purpose*, which includes as point 8 ECTS the following section: «Universities wish to take a leading role in the further development of ECTS. EUA will take up the challenge as part of its continued support to universities in implementing the Bologna Process reforms through the Bologna Handbook and the organization of dedicated seminars and other events». Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.eua.be/Libraries/quality-assurance/lisbon_declaration.pdf?sfvrsn=0

¹³¹ European University Website (EUA) Website, Information Project on Higher Education Reform: Call to Host an Event, 24 February 2006. Retrieved on 2 July 2018 from: http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/06-02-24/Information_Project_on_Higher_Education_Reform_Call_to_Host_an_Event.aspx

time the EUA made an effort, following a much more cautious attempt in 2002, which was related to the Zürich conference on ECTS. The move had the opposite effect of what the EUA had aimed for.

EUA's argument for taking over the responsibility for ECTS was rather awkward. According to EUA representatives, implementation of ECTS in many institutions led to overloading students' workload. The impression of the counsellors was exactly the opposite. Where ECTS was implemented correctly, the student workload was feasible. It were the universities in many countries that were the real problem, with staff not sufficiently acquainted with and experienced in applying a student workload based system. In particular for those institutions that had founded their administration and calculation of staff time (and therefore appointments) on actual contact or teaching hours, as in the case of the US Carnegie system, the transfer to another system proved to be very challenging. In countries which had a longer tradition with the use of student workload based credit systems, like the UK, Ireland, Netherlands, and the Scandinavian countries, feasibility was not experienced as an issue. It underpinned and confirmed the argument that the existing model of support, –a pool of international counsellors coordinated by a body or institution that had the financial capacity to fund it–, was the best (continued) way forward. It was also not by accident that in the setting of Tuning an approach for calculating student workload was developed, which was applied as training material for the counsellors –now Bologna Experts– group.¹³²

In retrospect it seems that the EUA mixed up general resistance against the Bologna Process in a number of countries with the implementation of ECTS. Or, as the counsellors suspected, the EUA management had proved to be rather sensitive to the UK lobby.¹³³ This suspicion was fed by the fact that EUA policy officer Michel Hoerig proposed to stretch the hours range from 1300 (instead of 1500) to 1800 for a normal academic year.¹³⁴ This was the more remarkable because in September 2007 the authoritative Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) published the results of a survey

¹³² Bologna Experts' Conference «Putting Bologna into Practice the Experts». Training Material. Brussels, July 2007.

¹³³ This can be derived from the e-mail correspondence between the coordinators of the national teams of Bologna promoters in the period October – November 2007.

¹³⁴ E-mail correspondence between members expert group about the ECTS users' guide suggestions. 17 November 2007.

which showed that the teaching and study time of English students was lower per week (typically 25 hours) than in countries on the continent (varying from 30-35 per week). Naturally this survey received media attention; in *The Guardian* under the witty heading «Time Bomb».¹³⁵

The clash between EUA and counsellors had as a side effect that the constructive cooperation between the EUA and Tuning terminated. From 2008 onward the EUA acted towards Tuning as a competitor instead of a comrade in arms, very much to the regret of the Tuning team. It would be many years before relations were normalized again. The affair also had an impact on the cooperation between the EUA and the European Commission. From 2002 to 2004 the EUA coordinated the ECTS/DS counsellors and from 2004 to 2007 the national teams of Bologna promoters. During these years the number of counsellors grew to some 350, now also including representatives of the new EU member states.¹³⁶ As a result the level of experience of the members of the group became rather uneven. This was a good argument to keep the pool in place, which would allow for collegial training. The direct involvement of the EUA in the development and promotion of ECTS (and the Bologna Process in general) came to an end with a major Bologna Experts' Conference, held in Brussels on 2-3 July 2007 entitled: «Putting Bologna into Practice –the Experts' contribution»-. a message not picked up by the EUA, as has been outlined above. The content of the Brussels conference was organized by the European Commission in close cooperation with Bologna Experts and technically supported by the EUA.¹³⁷ Nevertheless, it is fair to stipulate that the EUA did a marvellous job in the years it was responsible for «training» the vast growing group of counsellors/promoters. In December 2007 the European Commission assigned the service contract to UNICA – Network of Universities from the Capitals of Europe. It would run the project and its activities successfully until the

¹³⁵ Donald MacLeod, *Time bomb*, in: *The Guardian*, 25 September 2007. Article retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/sep/25/students.highereducation>

¹³⁶ European University Association (EUA), *Annual report 2007, Bologna promoters – information Project on higher Education reform*. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/EUA_2007_annual_report_final.pdf?sfvrsn=4

¹³⁷ «Putting Bologna into Practice the Experts' contribution. Bologna Experts' Conference, July 2007». Conference materials: Reader and Training Material Brochure.

summer of 2013 with support of the Brussels Education Services.¹³⁸ These activities were the preparation of information materials, two training sessions per year and facilitating networking between the Bologna experts.

In any case, the intervention of the EUA came (too) late, because the European Commission had already contracted GHK Consulting to «centralise the drafting process» of the new edition of the Users' Guide on the basis of an expert group of 11 members selected by the Commission, of which three represented respectively EUA, EURASHE and ESU (formerly ESIB). The others were Bologna Experts, seven of whom played a (leading) role in Tuning.¹³⁹ It was agreed that the updated Users' Guide would be based on the draft ECTS Key Features presented to the October Bologna Follow-Up Group in Lisbon and a previous draft discussed in June 2007. The Key Features were finalized in December 2007 as mentioned above, before the activities of the drafting group started at the beginning of 2008. The work to be done was divided over the counsellors, since they were the content experts.

Renewed interest for ECTS

Before the new edition of the ECTS Users' Guide was published in 2009, and as input to the Leuven-Louvain Bologna Follow-up Conference in the same year, three official Bologna Seminars were organized related to ECTS. The first one, «Learning Outcomes Based Higher Education – The Scottish Experience» (Edinburgh 21-22 February 2008), can be perceived as a follow-up of the conference «Using Learning Outcomes» organized four years earlier also in Edinburgh. For the 2008 seminar Stephen Adam had updated his 2004 report.¹⁴⁰ It en-

¹³⁸ Service contracts «Information Project on Higher Education Reform II and III».

¹³⁹ Full membership of the group, invited and appointed by the European Commission: Stephen Adam, Volker Gehmlich, Henri Luchan, John Reilly, Julia Gonzalez, Maria Sticchi-Damiani, Raimonda Markeviciene, Robert Wagenaar, Sandra Kraze (EURASHE), Michel Hoerig (EUA), Caroline Carlot (ESU). GHK Consulting Ltd was represented by Daniela Ulicna who acted as coordinator. Peter van der Hijden and Christian Tauch supervised activities on behalf of the European Commission.

¹⁴⁰ Stephen Adam, UK Bologna Expert, *Learning Outcomes current developments in Europe: Update on the issues and applications of Learning Outcomes associated with the Bologna Process*. Bologna Seminar: Learning outcomes based higher education: the Scottish experience 21-22 February 2008, at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland. Report retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: http://www.unica-network.eu/sites/default/files/ECVET_Edinburgh_Febo8_Adams.pdf

dorsed the proposition that «learning outcomes are the basic building blocks of the Bologna package of educational reforms», being the key to the paradigm shift from teacher to student-centred learning. There was agreement at the seminar that «it was unhelpful to counterpoise learning outcomes and workload, since both elements are important in the use of ECTS». It recommended to define learning outcomes at «threshold level» not «average» or «modal» level to allow for smooth recognition. Two months later the seminar «ECTS based on Learning Outcomes and Student Workload» took place in Moscow (17-18 April). It formulated 9 conclusions which can be read as challenges and as action points. Among them was the need for Common terminology to have clarity about the meaning of key concepts. Key stakeholders were asked to recognize the cultural shift required to move to the output-oriented approach. Furthermore, it was stressed that quality assurance procedures «must address the use of ECTS based on student workload and learning outcomes». In this context «proper implementation of ECTS» was seen «as a fundamental tool for planning curricula and enhancing quality and transparency».¹⁴¹

The largest of the three seminars on ECTS and Learning Outcomes was hosted by the Portuguese Directorate-General for Higher Education in Porto (19-20 June 2008), entitled «Development of a Common Understanding of Learning Outcomes and ECTS». It was attended by 137 delegates from 31 countries. The seminar was broadcast live on streaming video. The seminar was based on 3 topics and related key notes delivered by Declan Kennedy, Robert Wagenaar and Volker Gehmlich.¹⁴² For the conference 10 conclusions plus concrete recommendations were defined for the Bologna Follow-up Group, the higher education institutions and their representative bodies as well as relevant national authorities/ministries. A decade later, the sets of conclusions and recommendations are still highly relevant. There is an obvious and understandable overlap / repetition of the conclu-

¹⁴¹ «ECTS based on Learning Outcomes and Student Workload» Moscow, 17-18 April. Conclusions. Bologna Seminar co-organized by the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia together with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the National Training Foundation and the Council of Europe. Retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2007_09/semo7_09/ECTS_moscow/index.htm

¹⁴² Keynote Lecture 1: Declan Kennedy (University College Cork), «Everything you always wanted to know about Learning Outcomes!»; Keynote lecture 2: Robert Wagenaar (University of Groningen), «Learning Outcomes and ECTS: indispensable elements for teaching, learning and assessment in present day degree programmes?»; Keynote 3: Volker Gehmlich (Fachhochschule Osnabrück), «The wider implications of the European Qualifications Frameworks».

sions of the other two seminars, but their formulation is much more comprehensive. In its first conclusion it is stressed that the «shift to ECTS and learning outcomes requires a great deal of work». It defines what this means very clearly: «Support and training for staff in developing, writing and assessing Learning Outcomes is essential and this needs commitment at the highest level, including from heads of institutions and from ministers». It speaks of the role of stakeholders, ECTS as a planning tool, workload and feasibility, the outcomes of learning as a wider concept than learning outcomes covering also unintended / unplanned learning and the necessary alignment of ECTS with other parts of the Bologna Architecture. The 10th and final conclusion stipulates that «subject and discipline LO developed in international cooperation such as Tuning can be most useful in translating the generic LO on European and national/regional level into LO on the level of programmes and modules.¹⁴³

Although the seminars offered an excellent overview of the debate at the time, not much of it can be traced in the Leuven-Louvain Ministerial Communiqué (2009). It does not say more than that «the Bologna Process has promoted the Diploma Supplement and the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System to further increase transparency and recognition». It does highlight the role of academics, however, who «in close cooperation with students and employer representatives, will continue to develop learning outcomes and international reference points», a clear reference to the work of Tuning. The attention had indeed shifted to the student-centred approach as the remedy for reform.

It is interesting to note that the new edition of the ECTS Users' Guide was taken for granted. It was published on 6 February 2009, three months before the Ministerial Conference. The Guide built on the previous edition of 2004/5. As stated in its introduction, recent developments in the Bologna Process had been taken into account, such as the growing importance of lifelong learning, the role of qualifications frameworks and increasing use of the concept of learning outcomes. Stakeholder associations, Member States' experts and the Bologna Follow-up Group had been consulted in its production. The guide distinguishes its role as a tool, its use and its application. It stipulates that it is meant to serve all types of programmes, whatever the

¹⁴³ Gerard Madill, Universities Scotland, Rapporteur and Sebastião Feye de Azevedo, Chairman Organizing Committee, Bologna Seminar on «Development of a Common Understanding of Learning Outcomes and ECTS», Porto, 19-20 June 2008. Final Report and Recommendations.

mode of delivery, learner status and type of learning (formal, non-formal and informal). The Guide is well written and comprehensive, with 36 pages for its 8 chapters. The 5 annexes, covering another 24 pages, offer additional information. Annex five shows an «Overview of the national regulations on the number of learning hours per academic year». Contrary to the situation in 2002, the vast majority of countries had now fixed this number in legislation. In all countries the number of hours per ECTS credit is between 25 and 30 (implying 1500-1800 hours per academic year), the only exceptions are Ireland and the UK with 20 hours per ECTS credit. The handy format as well as its size met the expectations, as, it seems, did the content.¹⁴⁴

Again the odd men out were Ireland and the UK. UK Universities noted in its *Europe Note* of 20 July 2009 with some satisfaction that in the 2009 version no limits were placed on the number of ECTS credits to be awarded per calendar year. However, it realized that the inclusion of annex five mentioned above did not improve its situation. In the Note, it questioned the reliability of the «formal» information about the workload per country. It tried at length to make the argument that there was the «danger of focusing on student workload in isolation from learning outcomes». In its defence, it took the line of thinking of ECVET by stating that: «Credits points provide a measure for describing the achievements of designated learning outcomes at a specific level. One UK credit point represents the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by the average learner at the relevant level of 10 hours of notional hours of learning. Credit is a measure of the volume of the outcomes, not of actual study time». A remarkable conclusion which made the argument a *contradictio in terminis*. It should cover the fact that probably UK practice to equate one ECTS credit with two UK credits was not quite accurate. Indeed what can be observed is that the conversion of UK credits led to issues in continental Europe. The UK position that the full calendar Master qualifications of 180 UK credits equals 90 ECTS continues to be challenged. They do not give access to doctoral programmes in many EU countries.¹⁴⁵

What is new in the 2009 guide is the ECTS Grading Table. It is in practice a simplified version of the ECTS grading scales applied so far, as the following table shows.

¹⁴⁴ European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide*. Brussels, 6 February 2009. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European communities, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ UK Universities, *Europe Note*. London, 20 July 2009, 3-6. Retrieved on 3 July 2018 from: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report_July2009_UKHEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf

Table. 30 Years of ECTS: 30 years of debate about Grading / Grading Scale / Grading Table

1990-1992	1993-2004	2004-2009	2009-today
Percentages	Percentages + Qualifications	Percentages	Percentages
1 = best 25% 2 = next 25% 3 = next 25% 4 = final 25% of successful students	A = best 10% = Excellent B = next 25% = Very Good C = next 30% = Good D = next 25% = Satisfactory E = final 10% = Sufficient (of successful students) FX = Fail F = Fail	A = best 10% B = next 25% C = next 30% D = next 25% E = final 10% (of successful students) FX = Fail F = Fail	Grade distribution according to a national system, expressed in % of successful students (based on defined reference group: ISCED-F classification)

The table introduced in 2009 is the outcome of about 20 years of intense debate between experts, in which in particular Terence Karran and Richard de Lavigne played a prominent role.¹⁴⁶ In these discussions, it was widely acknowledged that countries had quite different grading cultures, with some countries not using their national grading scale to the full, such as France and the Netherlands, while others awarded grades belonging to the upper part of their national grading scale. Initiatives to develop a pan-European or unified grading scale proved not to be successful. A special working group set up for this purpose by the European Commission did not result in a satisfying outcome. Because in practice the ECTS grading scale was not really used, Peter van der Hijden asked Robert Wagenaar, who had been a participant in all discussions about grading conversion in the context of ECTS, to come up with a model that would have better chances for success.

Wagenaar's analysis was that the present grading scale required two actions: first the collection of data about grade distribution in a programme or course, followed by the conversion of this distribution by grouping them in percentage groups. He concluded that this last step was redundant, because it did not lead to additional information. To the contrary, it simplified information for no reason. His solution was that each grade be accompanied by the percentage of that grade awarded to the group of peers. In the note he prepared, he explained what the criteria should be for establishing this reference group. To catch the grading culture of a programme or department it might be even sufficient to of-

¹⁴⁶ Terence Karran, Pan-European Grading Scales: Lessons from National Systems and the ECTS, in: *Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. 30, No. 1, April 2005; Long e-mail sent by Richard de Lavigne to colleagues, dated 13 December 2012, offering some thought on the grading conversion issue.

fer the grade distribution as part of the national/local grading scale and to include this in the Diploma Supplement. After some editing by Maria Sticchi-Damiani this proposal was included in annex 3 of the *Users' Guide*. It inspired a consortium of universities, EGRACONS (European Grading Conversion System), coordinated by the University of Ghent, to come up with an online conversion tool, based on this new model.¹⁴⁷

Was the conversion of grades perceived as a major challenge, the use of ECTS as a transfer and an accumulation system based on the student-centred approach proved to be one as well. This can be derived from the outcomes of the Commission's initiative to award ECTS labels (besides Diploma Supplement labels) for successful implementation. Already in 2002 the European Commission launched as part of its information campaign the awarding of labels to stimulate both the use of ECTS and DS. At the time three criteria were defined, which still focused on ECTS as a transfer mechanism: an institutional Information Package/Course Catalogue in English and, if different, the national language; a correct allocation of credits according to student workload measured in time and the obligatory use of the ECTS tools.¹⁴⁸ 91 Higher education institutions applied of which only 11 met the criteria. The ECTS label, for the first time awarded in 2004, had a validity of three years. In 2005 another 10 higher education institutions obtained the ECTS label, not a very impressive number given the number of higher education institutions that received EU financial support to implement ECTS.¹⁴⁹ Publishing a complete Course Catalogue in English proved to be an insurmountable obstacle for many institutions. The label was re-launched in 2008 and awarded from 2009 again until 2013.

The number of institutions meeting the requirements continued to be rather disappointing. In the years 2009 and 2010 28 labels were awarded and the years 2011 and 2012 37. In 2013 another 25 higher

¹⁴⁷ European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide 2009*, 41-43; EGRACONS Website: <http://egracons.eu>

¹⁴⁸ European Commission, SOCRATES - ERASMUS Special measures for the promotion of ECTS and DS. Brussels, 2 December 2002. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: <http://eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EC%20doc%20on%20the%20promotion%20of%20ECTS-%20DS.1068807686692.pdf>; See for the label criteria: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) Key Features. 11.02.03. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: <http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/ECTS%20Key%20Features.1068807879166.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ European Commission, Press release: 11 Higher Education Institutions receive the ECTS Label during the First European Seminar for Bologna promoters. (IP/04/1376). Brussels, 17 November 2004; European Commission, *From Bergen to London. The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process*. Brussels, 7 May 2007. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2005_07/Position_pap_Consult_memb/FromBergentoLondonEC7May2007.pdf

education institutions, in particular from Turkey, obtained the label. Part of these labels were renewals.¹⁵⁰ Although the 2009 edition of the ECTS Users' Guide seemed to be an adequate description of the state of thinking regarding a student-centred /outcome based credit system, in the year directly preceding the next Bologna Follow-up conference to be held in Bucharest in 2012, the notion developed that there was further room for improvement. It seemed inspired by lack of progress made by higher education institutions to actually give substance to the implementation of the reforms. It also shows the incapability of the Bologna Follow-Up Group to give sufficient leadership to the desired reforms. This frustration resulted in the Bucharest Communiqué, in which the mixing up of EU responsibilities and those of the Bologna Signatory Countries is remarkable.

Contrary to the London (2007) and the Leuven-Louvain Communiqués (2009), the Bucharest Communiqué devotes a lot of attention to ECTS as core element for reform: «we must make further efforts to consolidate and build on progress». It stresses the need «for more coherence between our policies, especially in completing the transition to the three cycle system, the use of ECTS credits, the issuing of Diploma Supplements, the enhancement of quality assurance and the implementation of qualifications frameworks, including the definition and evaluation of learning outcomes». A key section is the following:

«To consolidate the EHEA, meaningful implementation of learning outcomes is needed. The development, understanding and practical use of learning outcomes is crucial to the success of ECTS, the Diploma Supplement, recognition, qualifications frameworks and quality assurance – all of which are interdependent. We call on institutions to further link study credits with both learning outcomes and student workload, and to include the attainment of learning outcomes in assessment procedures. We will work to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning". It identifies as two out of a total of 20 (!) priorities in the years up to the next ministerial Bologna Follow-up Conference, to be held in Yerevan in 2015:

¹⁵⁰ European Commission, *Excellence in Europe's Universities. ECTS and Diploma Supplement Holders 2009 & 2010. Make Mobility a Reality*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010; European Commission, *ECTS and Diploma Supplement Label Holders 2011 & 2012. Internationalisation in Europe's universities*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014; European Commission, *Erasmus - Celebrating ECTS and Diploma Supplement Label Holders 2009-2013*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

- Ensure that qualifications frameworks, ECTS and Diploma Supplement implementation is based on learning outcomes;
- Work to ensure that the ECTS Users' Guide fully reflects the state of on-going work on learning outcomes and recognition of prior learning.¹⁵¹

By formulating it in this way, the ownership of ECTS was once again challenged, this time not by the EUA but by the «Bologna» countries. Contrary to the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and the Qualifications Framework for the EHEA, ECTS was not a product of the Bologna Process, but one of the EU. Was it due to the inexperience of the new team at the European Commission responsible for the EU policy agenda in higher education? Whatever the case may be, contrary to previous years, the members of the «working group of practitioners» were appointed by the Bologna countries and stakeholder associations. The group counted 21 members of which 3 originated from outside the EU and 4 represented the associations. Six experts had been part of the working group responsible for the 2009 edition.¹⁵² It is remarkable that the UK had a representation of three members, while other countries only had one. The Commission positioned itself as coordinator of the drafting and consultation process. The same phrasing as used in the 2009 Guide, but with the crucial difference that in that guide the Commission expressed explicitly its responsibility for the «final wording» of the Guide. The 2015 edition states in its introduction: «the Guide has been adopted by Ministers for Higher Education of the European Higher Education Area in 2015 at the Yerevan ministerial conference. It is therefore the official Guide for the use of ECTS».¹⁵³ This implied that the Commission allowed it to become an official EHEA document and tool, which it had not been before and was alien to its path of development. It was an interesting policy move indeed.

¹⁵¹ Bucharest Communiqué 2012 - Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area.

¹⁵² These members were: Volker Gehmlich, Sandra Kraze (EURASHE), Raimonda Markeviciene, John Reilly, Maria Sticchi Damiani and Robert Wagenaar. Most of the editing work was done by Maria Sticchi Damiani, Raimonda Markeviciene and the European Commission policy official Klara Engels-Perenyi. The group was coordinated by Adam Tyson, head of unit / acting director at the EU Directorate General Education and Culture.

¹⁵³ European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide 2015*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, 7.

The wish of the EHEA member countries was to make the *ECTS Users' Guide* the core instrument for making the paradigm shift to student-centred learning and teaching. This had to be established by focusing more on ECTS as a means for programme design, delivery and monitoring, including instructions on how to write programme learning outcomes. In this Guide a separate chapter is devoted to this topic. As could be expected, in the working group a discussion took place about the balance between workload and learning outcomes and the role of time as part of the learning process. The phrase, «in most cases, workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work», remained part of the key features. The overview of credit ranges per country was no longer included, because it no longer had a purpose. In general, it was decided not to make changes to the key features, although those included in the 2015 edition offer more detail than the previous version (see the annex to this publication). The role of learning outcomes is strengthened in the definition of credits: «ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload». The 2009 edition states that «ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes». A subtle difference. The Guide is more user friendly and better designed than its predecessor. It offers more and better explanations and tailored examples; examples concerning programme profiles and programme learning outcomes, unit or module learning outcomes and grade conversion. It also contains an extensive and very useful glossary.¹⁵⁴ It is fair to conclude that the final product met the expectations and was well received.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ *Ibidem*. The Guide holds 105 pages of which some 40 are reserved for annexes.

¹⁵⁵ An exception in this respect is Declan Kennedy, author of the publication *Writing and Using Learning Outcomes. A Practical Guide*. Cork: University College Cork, 2007. See: Declan Kennedy and Marian McCarthy, Learning Outcomes in the ECTS Users' Guide 2015, in: *Journal of the European Higher Education Area*. Issue 3, Berlin: DUZ Verlags- und Medienhaus GmbH, 2016, 1-14. The publication seems to be part of a quest against Tuning. Earlier publications by the same author (Kennedy): D. Kennedy, A. Hylan, N. Ryan, Learning Outcomes and competences, in: E. Froment, J. Kohler, L. Purser, L. Wilson, eds., *EUA Bologna Handbook – Making Bologna Work*. Berlin: Raabe, 2009, 1-18; Andy Gibbs, Declan Kennedy, Anthony Vickers, Learning Outcomes, Degree Profiles, Tuning Project and Competences, in: *Journal of the European Higher Education Area. Policy, Practice and Institutional Engagement*. No. 1, 2012, 71-87. The contributions do not express deep knowledge and understanding of the scholarly and public debate about the concept of competency based learning since 1995.

The sensitive issue of sub-levels within cycles which go beyond the European and National Qualifications Frameworks is not discussed in the *Users' Guide 2015*, nor was it in previous ones. As in the case of the 2009 edition the attention is limited to progression routing and related rules, essential elements for a credit accumulation system. The topic was seriously discussed, however, as part of the Tuning *Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and Arts* (HUMART) project (2010-2011)¹⁵⁶ and further elaborated in the setting of the recent *Measuring and Comparing Achievements of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education in Europe* (CALOHEE) project (2016-2018). The CALOHEE project resulted in a sound and robust solution by applying three sub-levels within both the first and the second cycle (Bachelor and Master).

Anno 2018 ECTS is the national credit and transfer system in all EU countries, with the exception of Scotland, Bulgaria, Latvia and Sweden which run their own national system, which in all cases seems to be compatible to ECTS. In England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Czech Republic the use of a credit system is not a formal requirement. According to the *Bologna Progress Implementation Report 2018* 45 systems (out of 48) have indicated that all first and second cycle higher education programmes use ECTS (or ECTS compatible systems). According to the 2015 report this number was 36 in the years 2013/14. However, this number does not tell us much about the correct implementation or quality of the application of ECTS. According to the information collected in 2016/17, for the *Progress Report* ECTS (or compatible systems) credits are used nowadays for transfer and accumulation by nearly all higher education institutions for their first and second cycle programmes. It has been reported that in one third of the EHEA countries learning outcomes are not linked to ECTS credits.¹⁵⁷ Even if this is correct, the quality of these learning outcomes is doubtful and in the vast majority of cases are not underpinned by appropriate learning, teaching and assessment strategies and approaches, as is described in the Tuning study A

¹⁵⁶ Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010-2011. Bilbao-Groningen, 2012. Retrieved from the Tuning Educational Structures in Europe Website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/sqf-humanities-and-arts.html>

¹⁵⁷ Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, *The European Higher Education Area in 2018. Bologna Progress Implementation Report*. Brussels, 2018, 51-53.

Long Way To Go.¹⁵⁸ This is confirmed by the report *Bologna with Student Eyes 2018. The Final Countdown*. In the report it is concluded that «while ECTS points seem to be thoroughly implemented across EHEA, the situation with learning outcomes is more worrying ... only seven of the respondents stated that amount of credits are always based on the formulation of learning outcomes». Regarding the related student-centred approach it remarks that «it is disappointingly clear that there is still a long way to go. Student-centred learning in many ways depends on a shift towards outcome-based education and the use of learning outcomes methodology in general, but to date, not enough progress has been made in the implementation of these basic tools of the Bologna process».¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Study commissioned by the European Commission: International Tuning Academy, *A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU and the USA*. Prepared by Tim Birthwistle and Robert Wagenaar. Groningen, 2016; See also: Tim Birthwistle, Courtney Brown and Robert Wagenaar, *A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU*, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Volume 3, Issue No. 2, (May 2016), pp. 429-463.

¹⁵⁹ The European Students' Union (ESU), *Bologna with Student Eyes 2018. The Final Countdown*. Brussels, May 2018, 110.



Conclusion

From its initiation ECTS was the fruit of the commitment and vision of a relatively small number of European Commission officials supported by a small group of academics and administrators. Remarkable is the consistency of key people involved in developing the system over time. Setting up the system and rolling it out should be seen as a *tour de force*, because there was not much to build upon. All involved showed drive and the will to succeed. Having the experience of only two ERASMUS cohorts, it was obvious nevertheless that large scale student mobility could never be successful without a reliable instrument to indicate the volume of learning. This was already foreseen by the Adonnino Ad Hoc Committee. A credit system was perceived as one of the three factors for making possible recognition of studies taken abroad. Basing it on the notion of student workload proved to be sensible, but revolutionary. Clear was also that a common format was required to describe organisational and content information, the ECTS Information Package / Course Catalogue. Besides these two, the third identified necessary factor was trust and confidence between the higher education institutions involved. The composition of the management team, European Commission and ERASMUS staff plus the five academics showed to be a successful formula. Although tensions occurred at and after the fifth Plenary Meeting in the autumn of 1992, there was real team spirit.

To answer the question raised at the beginning of this publication how a revolutionary and ambitious idea –that is the development of a credit reference system based on student workload– was turned into a working system by a small inexperienced team, intensive cooperation was certainly one element. Another, probably as decisive, were the financial means made available by the European Commission. Furthermore, there was high awareness among the members of the Inner Circle that they were part of a Pilot that intended to have far-reaching consequences. The shared responsibility was perceived as an incentive.

As has been shown, many –if not all– of the issues related to student mobility and recognition of studies were intensely discussed during the six years of the Pilot Scheme phase. It operated not only as a form of «educational action research» but also as a pressure cooker in coming up with quick solutions for a wide range of challenges, ranging from language preparation and grade conversion to thesis work and the inclusion of minors and subsidiary courses. During the pilot years also the administrative infrastructure was developed that are still in use today, such as (the formats of the) ECTS Information Package / Course Catalogue, Application Forms, Learning Agreements and Transcript of Records. ECTS –besides the ICPs– proved also to be instrumental for organising the academic year better and to adjust the start and end dates of the academic year. Having a platform for discussing this type of issues proved to be an asset.

In retrospect a number of key moments can be identified in the development of ECTS. Besides the preparatory phase, the evaluation by a respected accountancy firm in 1992-93 proved to be such a moment. Coopers & Lybrand gave ECTS not only its fiat, but, as a result of its report, also status. This proved to be important for the extension activities after the termination of the Pilot phase in 1995. Additional funds and the offering of expertise for implementation allowed for wider implementation, which implied another key moment. The European Commission invested considerable funds to cover more subject areas and involve more higher education institutions. It also created an infrastructure for this aim. It set up a system of national helplines and installed an international group of promoters. This self-increasing «grass-root» experts' group proved to be an effective instrument, not only for dissemination, but also for identifying obstacles. One of these proved to be a disappointing level of recognition of studies. Over the years, it became clear that flexibility had to be organised since higher education institutions and their staffs were generally captured in fixed structures. If not, the ECTS system would not reach the level of a main stream instrument and might even be marginalised to an instrument only applied for credit transfer for a small group of students.

Serious concern about the future role of ECTS resulted in the set-up by the European Commission of the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. It should result in a bold step forward, an encompassing credit accumulation system for all types of learning. The project resulted in a double message, the need for a Lifelong Learning framework and an over-arching European credit accumulation and trans-

fer framework. However, the working group was not able to offer clarity how to proceed further, it could not crack the puzzle it had created itself. This required another type of initiative, which would arise from the discussions of the ECTS counsellors group in the millennium year.

The next key moment was the Sorbonne Declaration (1998), followed up by the Bologna Declaration (1999). Both were a clear indicator that the modernisation and reform of the higher education sector and institutions reflected in their study programmes was felt to be needed to meet the challenges of a growing global competition. It triggered the idea of lifelong learning, which would require a different type of credit system: a system not only applicable for transfer, but also for the accumulation of credits. Although the ECTS Extension Feasibility Project of 1999/2000 did not come up with a clear action plan, it did define the challenge. This challenge was transformed in 2000 in the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project. It prepared in turn the pathway for accepting the idea of accumulation of credits by higher education institutions at the EUA Zürich Conference of October 2002. It served also as a good basis for the preparation of the new Users' Guide 2004/5, which was based on the Tuning project outcomes. In its combination, the Zürich Conference and the new edition of the Users' Guide was another key moment in the development of ECTS. Again a relatively small group of academics took the lead, which over time had become real experts as *connaisseurs* and promoters of the ECTS brand. All of them had their roots in the ECTS Pilot Scheme.

These key moments are reflected in the name, not in its acronym ECTS. What started as the European Community Course Credit Transfer System, was simplified to European Credit Transfer System in 1995 and transformed into the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System in 2002. After 2002, ECTS was further developed as a result of the strong cooperation between Tuning, the EUA and the European Commission. Essential in this cooperation was the focus on student-centred learning, which was only embraced by the Bologna Follow-up Group from 2007. This was the year when the key features were evaluated and rephrased without changing their essence. They reflect the stronger emphasis on the concept of learning outcomes as an essential component for a credit accumulation system.

Over time ECTS led to the creation of a substantial group of experts, consisting of an international group and national Helplines, who developed a deep understanding of processes not only related to

student mobility but also to curriculum reform. From the adoption of the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declarations it was very clear that reforms at national level were required to offer European higher education a future in a globalising society. It is not to bold to defend the position that without the ERASMUS, but most of all the ECTS experience, there would not have been a Bologna Process. The same applies to the role of Tuning in relation to the transformation of ECTS into a transfer and accumulation system. Without the Tuning experience there would not be ECTS as we know it today.

In terms of reflection, training of counsellors as well as dissemination of the successive «Quality Enhancement» (1995-96) and «Quality Appraisal in ECTS» (1997-2001, both coordinated by Richard Whewell and the ECTS Counselling and Site Visit Programme (2001-2004) and the Information Project on Higher Education Reform I (2004-2007) coordinated by the EUA, played a key role. In 2007 this role was taken over by the university network UNICA which continued to offer a framework for the training of Bologna promoters and a platform for the exchange of information. It was all financed by the European Commission. Since 2013 a European structure is absent and half of the EU countries have lost their national team of Bologna promoters. Although there is an up-to-date Users Guide (2015) this seems to be an insufficient instrument for implementing ECTS further according to the principles of a student-centred approach. It seems that the European Commission gave in too easily to the signatories of the Bologna Declaration to make promotion and further implementation of ECTS a national responsibility. As we know now, many countries have not carried out that responsibility sufficiently well, and as a result undermined the stability of the whole endeavour. It remains to be seen whether the political choice of the European Commission to make the EHEA countries responsible for the latest edition of the Users' Guide (2015) will pay off. Since 2015 no serious progress has been made. The disappointing number of ECTS labels awarded in the period 2004-2014 shows that ECTS implementation and use require serious effort.

In retrospect, it is remarkable that from around 2002 countries started to include ECTS in their national legislation, turning it from a voluntary applied credit reference system into an official –national– one. The many Bologna Seminars, Leiria, Zürich, Edinburgh, Moscow and Porto were instrumental in boosting the importance of having a robust overarching credit transfer and accumulation system. It is interesting to note that in particular one country, the UK, showed by far the most interest in the development of ECTS from the turn of the century.

Although it never indicated that it wanted to adopt the ECTS system at national level, it lobbied intensively with respect to its rules, the ECTS Key Features. While other countries had something to win, the UK had much to lose: the status of its full year (12 months) Master programme. The country and its higher education institutions and experts dominated the debate during the period 2000-2015. This astonished the group of ECTS counsellors and promoters, in particular when the EUA seemed to be receptive to the UK position and arguments. By playing down or even denying the factor time in the learning process by in practice promoting the ECVET approach –credits reflect learning outcomes only–, the UK tried to undermine deliberately the foundation of ECTS out of pure self-interest. It did not succeed.

Over time, a core group of less than 5 different European Commission officers and less than 10 academics, supported actively by many, many others, were able to turn a bold idea into reality, that is a sustainable European transfer and accumulation credit system based on the notions of student workload and learning outcomes, which today is a world standard. This is an outcome that could only be dreamed of 30 years ago when the first steps were made. It shows that a limited number of people can indeed make a difference.



Bibliography

Note: All reports that are quoted in the text are included as primary sources. Websites to which is referred to are included as secondary sources.

Primary sources

Adam, Stephen, International Seminar Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems, Leiria 23-24 November 2000. Report of the General Rapporteur. Tuning Archive.

Adam, Stephen, Power Point Using Learning Outcomes, slides 12-14. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: http://aic.lv/bologna/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/S_Adam_Bacgrerrep_presentation.pdf

Adam, Stephen, UK Bologna Expert, *Learning Outcomes current developments in Europe: Update on the issues and applications of Learning Outcomes associated with the Bologna Process*. Bologna Seminar: Learning outcomes based higher education: the Scottish experience 21 - 22 February 2008, at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, Scotland. Report retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: http://www.unica-network.eu/sites/default/files/ECVET_Edinburgh_Febo8_Adams.pdf

Adam, Stephen, *Using Learning Outcomes. A consideration of the nature, role, application and implications for European education of employing 'learning outcomes' at the local, national and international levels*. United Kingdom Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004, Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh Conference Centre) Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2004. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: http://media.ehea.info/file/Learning_Outcomes_Edinburgh_2004/76/8/040620LEARNING_OUTCOMES-Adams_577768.pdf.

Annual meeting ECTS Counsellors, Draft agenda, Aveiro, 9-10 July 1999. Invitation letter to participate as evaluator in project on Info Packs, prepared by Peter Blok. Tuning Archive.

Bergen Communiqué 2005 - European Higher Education Area - Achieving the Goals. Communiqué of the Conference of European Ministers Responsible for Higher Education, Bergen, 19-20 May 2005.

Berlin Communiqué 2003 - 'Realising the European Higher Education Area': Communiqué of the Conference of Ministers Responsible for Higher Education in Berlin on 19 September 2003 [Berlin Communiqué]. Berlin: Bologna-Berlin2003 Project Team, 2003.

Birtwistle, Tim and Robert Wagenaar, *A Long Way To Go ...A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU and the USA*. Final report. Groningen: International Tuning Academy, 2016.

Bologna Experts' Conference "Putting Bologna into Practice the Experts'. Training Material. Brussels, July 2007. Tuning Archive.

Bologna Seminar 'ECTS based on Learning Outcomes and Student Workload' Moscow, 17-18 April. Conclusions. Bologna Seminar co-organized by the Peoples' Friendship University of Russia together with the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the National Training Foundation and the Council of Europe. Retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2007_09/sem07_09/ECTS_moscow/index.htm

Bologna Working Group on Qualifications Frameworks, *A Framework for Qualifications of the European Higher Education Area*. Copenhagen: Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, February 2005.

Bucharest Communiqué 2012 - Making the Most of Our Potential: Consolidating the European Higher Education Area. Bucharest, 2012.

Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS Actieprogramma ter bevordering van de mobiliteit van de studenten in het hoger onderwijs van de Europese Gemeenschap. Overdracht van studiebelastingpunten van de Europese Gemeenschap. Presentatie van het ECTS Proefschema*. Tweede editie 1990. Brussel: ERASMUS Bureau, 1990.

Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS. ECTS Overdrachtsysteem van studiepunten van de Europese Gemeenschap*. Tweede editie. Luxemburg: Bureau voor officiële publikaties der Europese Gemeenschappen, 1990.

Commissie van de Europese Gemeenschappen, *ERASMUS. ECTS Overdrachtsysteem van studiepunten van de Europese Gemeenschap*. Luxemburg: Bureau voor officiële publikaties der Europese Gemeenschappen, 1994.

Commission of the European Communities, *A People's Europe. Report from the ad hoc Committee*. Bulletin of the European Communities. Supplement 7/1985. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1985, 25. Retrieved from: http://aei.pitt.edu/992/1/andonnino_report_peoples_europe.pdf

Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report ERASMUS Programme 1989* (COM (90) 128 Final). Brussels, 5 April 1990.

Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report ERASMUS Programme 1990/91* (SEC (91) 902 final), Brussels, 22 May 1991.

Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991. ERASMUS Programme*. SEC (92) 796 final. Brussels, 30 June 1992.

Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1992. ERASMUS Programme*. COM(93) 268 final. Brussels, 25 June 1993.

Commission of the European Communities, *Annual Report 1991 ERASMUS Programme* (SEC (92) 796 final), Brussels, 30 June 1992.

Commission of the European Communities, *ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1994* (COM (95) 416 final), Brussels, 08.09.1995.

Commission of the European Communities, *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. European Community Course Credit System*. Leaflet. Brussels, 1989.

Commission of the European Communities, *Guidelines for Information Packages*, 1993. Included in the Final Report for the Academic Year 1992-1993 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History. Groningen: University of Groningen, 1993. Tuning Archive.

Commission of the European Communities, *Recommendations of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Credit system for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET)* [SEC(2008) 442 SEC(2008) 443]. Brussels, 9.4.2008

COM(2008) 180 final 2008/0070 (COD), 5. Retrieved 07-10-2018:
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52008PCo180&from=EN>

Commission of the European Communities, *Report from the Commission. ERASMUS Programme 1992. Annual Report* (COM (93) 268 final), Brussels, 25 June 1993.

Commission of the European Communities, *Report from the Commission. ERASMUS Programme. Annual Report 1993* ((COM (94) 281 final). Brussels, 06-07.1994.

Council of Europe, *Common European Framework of References for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. Retrieved from: https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf

CQFW, NICATS, NUCCAT and SEEC, *Credit and HE Qualifications. Credit Guidelines for HE Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland*. November 2001.

E-mail correspondence between members expert group about the ECTS users' guide suggestions. 17 November 2007. Tuning Archive.

E-mail correspondence between the coordinators of the national teams of Bologna promoters in the period October – November 2007. Tuning Archive.

E-mail from Richard de Lavigne to colleagues, dated 13 December 2012. Tuning Archive.

E-mail from Robert Wagenaar to the EUA representatives and the members of the working group of national counsellors, dated 8 October 2002. Tuning Archive.

E-mail from Sylvia Brochu on behalf of Lesley Wilson to Robert Wagenaar, dated 6 September 2002. Tuning Archive.

E-mail from Volker Gehmlich dated 17 November 2000. Tuning Archive.

ECTS/DS Counselling and Site Visit Programme, Supported by the SOCRATES programme of the European Commission. Coordinated by the European University Association (EUA), ECTS/DS Counsellors' pool, 1st July 2002. Tuning Archive.

ECTS Counsellors – Address list, July 2000. Tuning Archive.

EHEA (European Higher Education Area), Work Programme 1999-2001. International Seminar on Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systems. Bologna Seminar Leiria, Portugal 24/11/2000 - 25/11/2000. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://www.ehea.info/cid100286/seminar-on-credit-accumulation-and-transfer-systems.html>

ERASMUS Bureau, ERASMUS. European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. Fifth Plenary Meeting. Institut National Polytechnique de Toulouse 25-27 October 1992. Minutes. (ERAB/93/ECTS/Plenary Meeting/25-27 Oct 92/Minutes). Tuning Archive.

Europe Unit Universities UK, *Europe Note*, London 20 July 2009. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report_July2009_UK-HEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf

Europe Unit Universities UK, *Master degrees and the Bologna Process*, London, 13 July 2004. Tuning Archive.

European Commission, Council Decision of 15 June 1987 adopting the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (Erasmus). 87/327/EEC. Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A31987D0327>

European Commission DG XXII 'Education, Training, Youth, *European Credit Transfer System. ECTS Users' Guide*, Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1995.

European Commission, DG Education and Culture, *The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET), Get to know ECVET better. Questions and Answers*. Revised edition 2011. Brussels.

European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Skills, Note to the ECVET Users' Group Members and the Coordinators of National Teams of ECVET Experts. Subject: Discussion on the future of ECVET. Brussels, 16 June 2016. Retrieved 06-10-2018: <http://www.ecvet-secretariat.eu/en/system/files/documents/3550/discussion-note-future-ecvet.pdf>

European Commission, Document ECTS Key Features (1 October 2007). Tuning Archive.

European Commission, *ECTS and Diploma Supplement Label Holders 2011 & 2012. Internationalisation in Europe's universities*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014.

European Commission, ECTS Extension "Questions and Answers". Tuning Archive.

European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide*. Brussels, 6 February 2009. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European communities, 2009.

European Commission, ECTS Users' Guide. European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the Diploma Supplement. Brussels, 17 Augustus 2004. Tuning Archive.

European Commission, *ECTS Users' Guide 2015*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015

European Commission, *Erasmus - Celebrating ECTS and Diploma Supplement Label Holders 2009-2013*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015.

European Commission, ERASMUS European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS) Call for expressions of interest from universities (88/C 197/08). Official Journal of the European Communities No C 197/11 27.7.1988. Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:JOC_1988_197_R_0011_01&from=EN

European Commission, European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). Key Features. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2004. ISBN 92-894-4742-7. The publication can be approached from: <http://netceng.eu/downloads//useful-information/ECTS%20Key%20features%20-%20EN.pdf>.

European Commission, *Excellence in Europe's Universities. ECTS and Diploma Supplement Holders 2009 & 2010. Make Mobility a Reality*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010.

European Commission, *From Bergen to London. The contribution of the European Commission to the Bologna Process*. Brussels, 7 May 2007. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: http://www.aic.lv/bologna/2005_07/Position_pap_Consult_memb/FromBergentoLondonEC7May2007.pdf

- European Commission, Letter to the Rectors and Heads of institutions that will receive a visit of ECTS counsellors in 1997/9-1998. Brussels, 13 May 1997. Tuning Archive.
- European Commission, Press Release Database. Retrieved on 3 April 2018 from: http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-86-145_en.htm
- European Commission, Press release ERASMUS. ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. Retrieved on 31 July 2000 from <http://europe.eu.int/comm/education/socrates/ectsext.html>. A printed version of this text in Tuning Archive.
- European Commission, Press release: 11 Higher Education Institutions receive the ECTS Label during the First European Seminar for Bologna promoters. (IP/04/1376). Brussels, 17 November 2004. Tuning Archive.
- European Commission, Selection Criteria for Establishments to be Visited in 1997/98 by ECTS Experts. Tuning Archive.
- European Commission, SOCRATES – ERASMUS. Special measures for the promotion of ECTS and DS. Brussels, 2 December 2002. Retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/EC%20doc%20on%20the%20promotion%20of%20ECTS-%20DS.1068807686692.pdf>
- European Commission, *What is ECTS? Leaflet prepared by the ERASMUS Bureau*. Brussels, 1989.
- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, *The European Higher Education Area in 2018: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018.
- European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS), History Network 1989-1995. Minutes of the Autumn Meeting of the Subject Area Group of History. Alcalá de Henares, 5 November 1993. Tuning Archive.
- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), Key Features. 11.02.03. Retrieved on 4 July 2018 from: <http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/ECTS%20Key%20Features.1068807879166.pdf>
- European Students' Union (ESU), *Bologna with Student Eyes 2018. The Final Countdown*. Brussels, May 2018.

European University Association (EUA), Annual report 2007, Bologna promoters – information Project on higher Education reform. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.eua.be/Libraries/publications-homepage-list/EUA_2007_annual_report_final.pdf?sfvrsn=4

European University Association (EUA), Credit Transfer and Accumulation – the Challenges for Institutions and Students. EUA/Swiss Confederation Conference. ETH Zürich, 11/12 October 2002. Conclusions and Recommendations for Action. Brussels, December 2002, 2. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <http://www.eua.be/activities-services/events/past/2002/Autumn-Conference-2002.aspx>

European University Association (EUA), *ECTS Counselling and Site Visit Programme. The state of implementation of ECTS in Europe. A short survey carried out by EUA in co-operation with the ECTS/DS national coordinators*. Brussels, 2002. Tuning Archive.

European University Association (EUA), Recommendation from EUA and the national ECTS counsellors regarding the role of ECTS in the elaboration of a European Qualifications Framework. Brussels, 23 June 2004. Tuning Archive.

European University Association (EUA), *The Lisbon Declaration Europe's Universities beyond 2010: Diversity with a common purpose*. Brussels, 13 April 200. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.eua.be/Libraries/quality-assurance/lisbon_declaration.pdf?sfvrsn=0

European University Association (EUA) Website: Information Project on Higher Education Reform: Call to Host an Event, 24 February 2006. Retrieved on 2 July 2018 from: http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/06-02-24/Information_Project_on_Higher_Education_Reform_Call_to_Host_an_Event.aspx

European University Association (EUA) Website: News page. Enhancing the implementation of ECTS, 5 November 2007. Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: http://www.eua.eu/activities-services/news/newsitem/07-11-05/Enhancing_the_implementation_of_ECTS.aspx.

EWNI Credit Forum. Meeting with ECTS Counsellors to discuss: The European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System. Board Room Universities UK, Woburn House, 13 June 2003. Tuning Archive.

Invitation for counsellors meeting, Brussels, 7 July 1997. Tuning Archive.

LinkedIn profile Mary O'Mahoney.

London Communiqué of 18 May 2007, Towards the European Higher Education Area: responding to challenges in a globalised world.

List of Counsellors Quality Enhancement in ECTS (1996). Tuning Archive.

Madill, Gerard, Universities Scotland, Rapporteur and Sebastião Feyo de Azevedo, Chairman Organizing Committee, Bologna Seminar on 'Development of a Common Understanding of Learning Outcomes and ECTS', Porto, 19-20 June 2008. Final Report and Recommendations. Tuning Archive.

Note "European Credit Transfer System. Quality Appraisal in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell, June 1997. Tuning Archive.

Overview of institutions to be visited '98/'99; Overview of institutions to be visited 1999-2000. Questionnaire for use on ECTS Appraisal Visits; ECTS Self-Evaluation Questionnaire. All documents in Tuning Archive.

Putting Bologna into Practice the Experts' contribution. Bologna Experts' Conference, July 2007'. Conference materials: Reader and Training Material Brochure. Tuning Archive.

Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 June 2009 on the establishment of a European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET) (Text with EEA relevance) (2009/C 155/02). Retrieved on 23 June 2018 from: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2009:155:0011:0018:EN:PDF>

Report for the European Commission. ECTS Extension Feasibility Project. January 2000. Retrieved 3 June 2018 from: https://media.ehea.info/file/BFUG_Seminar/96/8/ECTS_ext_feasibility_553968.pdf. Full report including appendixes to be found on EUCEN Observatory for Lifelong Learning (LLL) website: <http://lifelonglearning-observatory.eucen.eu/ectsextfp>. Retrieved on 3 June 2018.

Report of the SEEC Conference. Prepared by Sarah J. Gershon, Vice-Chair SEEC, 24 March 2003. Tuning Archive.

- Report on the Position of the Final Thesis in the ECTS Pilot Programme. European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Subject Area: History. Ref. no. 058a.93/ECTS, dd. October 1993 / R. Wagenaar, SAC for History. Tuning Archive.
- Report on the Position of the Minor Subjects/Subsidiary courses in the ECTS Pilot Scheme. Ref.no. 063a93/ECTS, d.d. October 1993/R. Wagenaar, SAC for History. Tuning Archive.
- Report prepared by the Portuguese Ministry of Science, Technology and Higher Education as input to the OECD Thematic Review of Tertiary Education. Country Background Report: PORTUGAL. September 2006, Retrieved on 23 May 2018 from: <https://www.oecd.org/portugal/37745972.pdf>
- Service contracts 'Information Project on Higher Education Reform II and III'. Tuning Archive.
- Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth, *Evaluation of the pilot phase of the European Community Course Credit Transfer System. Final Report*. Brussels: Coopers & Lybrand, February 1993. Tuning Archive.
- Technical Working Group on Credit Transfer in VET, First Report on Credit Transfer in VET November 2002 – October 2003, in 2003. Report retrieved on 1 July 2018 from: https://www.bibb.de/dokumente/pdf/foko6_neues-aus-europa_o8_anlage.pdf
- Transfer of Grades between institutions in ECTS. Note prepared by Richard Whewell on behalf of the ECTS working group of grade conversion, 1992. Tuning Archive.
- Tuning Educational Structure in Europe. Meeting Document 2, Working Papers, 10-11. Tuning Archive;
- Tuning Educational Structure in Europe. Meeting Document 3, Working Papers. Educational structures, Workload, Credits and Learning outcomes, annex 1, 13. Tuning Archive.
- Tuning Educational Structures in Europe, Report of the meeting of the Management Committee in Osnabrück, Germany, 05/07/2001. Tuning Archive.
- Tuning Sectoral Qualifications Frameworks for the Humanities and the Arts. Final Report 2010 – 2011. Bilbao-Groningen, 2012. Retrieved from the Tuning Europe website: <http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/sqf-humanities-and-arts.html>

- UK Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004. Report for BFUG. Prepared by Ann McVie on behalf of the UK Seminar Organising Committee. September 2004. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: http://www.aic.lv/bolona/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/11_03_Edinb_Report.pdf
- United Kingdom Bologna Seminar 1-2 July 2004. Programme. Heriot-Watt University (Edinburgh Conference Centre) Edinburgh, Scotland, June 2004. Retrieved on 18 June 2018 from: http://www.aic.lv/bolona/Bologna/Bol_semin/Edinburgh/programme.pdf
- Universities UK, *Europe Note*. London, 20 July 2009, 3-6. Retrieved on 3 July 2018 from: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/linkinglondon/resources/apel-credit-resources/report_July2009_UKHEGuidanceCreditinEngland-ECTS.pdf
- Universities UK, *Proposals for national arrangements for the use of academic credit in higher education in England. Final report of the Burgess Group*. London: Universities UK, December 2006. Last retrieved on 5 July 2018 from: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2006/proposals-for-national-arrangements-use-academic-credit-in-he-england.pdf>
- Universities UK, *The second convention of European Higher Education Institutions: Briefing for UK Higher Education Institutions. 29-31 May 2003, Graz*. Tuning Archive.
- Wagenaar, Robert, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1990-1991 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. ERASMUS – European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Groningen, 1991. Tuning Archive.
- Wagenaar, Robert, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1992-1993 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. Groningen, 1993. Tuning Archive
- Wagenaar, Robert, *Final Report for the Academic Year 1993-1994 of the Subject Area Coordinator for History*. ERASMUS – European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Groningen, 1994. In this report the Minutes of the Autumn Meeting of the Subject Area Group of History, Alcala de Henares, 4 November 1993, 7. Tuning Archive.

Wagenaar, Robert, Transcripts. Session 1.07. European Association for International Cooperation. 5th annual conference 'Europe and Beyond'. The Hague, 2-4 December 1993. Tuning Archive.

Secondary sources

Adam, Stephen, Principles of a Pan-European Credit Accumulation Framework: Good Practice Guidelines, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 215-222.

Adam, Stephen and Peter Blok, ECTS: from credit transfer to credit accumulation – a challenge for the 21st century, in: *EAIE Forum*. Vol. 1. No. 3, Autumn 1999, pp. 8-9.

Autissier, A-M., *The European Cultural Foundation: A look back at fifty years of activity (1954-2004)*. Amsterdam: European Cultural Foundation, 2004.

Birtwistle, Tim, Courtney Brown and Robert Wagenaar, A Long Way To Go ... A Study on the implementation of the learning-outcomes based approach in the EU, in: *Tuning Journal for Higher Education*. Volume 3, No. 2, May 2016, pp. 429-463.

Corbet, Ann, *Universities and the Europe of Knowledge. Ideas, Institutions and Policy Entrepreneurship in European Union Higher Education Policy, 1955-2005*. Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Craft, Alama, ed., Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Proceedings of an International Conference *Hong Kong 1991*. London: The Falmer Press, 1992.

Dalichow, Fritz, CATS and EUROCATS, in: *EAIE Forum*. Vol 1. No. 3, Autumn 1999, pp. 5-7.

Dalichow, Fritz, European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS): A Leading Concept for TransEuropean and Trans-Atlantic Student Exchange?, in: *Higher Education Policy*. Vol. 4, No. 3, 1991, pp. 44-47.

Dalichow, Fritz, European Community Course Credit Transfer System (ECTS), in: *Journal Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. 15, No. 2., 1990, pp. 72-73.

- Dalichow, Fritz, Mutual Recognition and Transfer of Credits, in: Alma Craft ed., *Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Proceedings of an International Conference Hong Kong 1991*. London: The Falmer Press, 1992, pp. 181-188.
- Dalichow, Fritz and Ulrich Teichler, published *Higher education in the European Community: recognition of study abroad in the European Community: the findings of a survey of "joint study programmes"* Report prepared at the request of the Office for Cooperation in Education for the Commission of the European Communities. Luxembourg, 1986.
- EGRACONS (European Grade Conversion System) Website: <http://egracons.eu>
- Erasmus Newsletter* No. 1. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1989.
- European Cultural Foundation, *ECG and the ERASMUS Exchange Programme – 30 years of student exchange*. August 3, 2017. Retrieved from: : <http://www.culturalfoundation.eu/library/ecf-and-erasmus>
- Gibbs, Andy, Declan Kennedy, Anthony Vickers, Learning Outcomes, Degree Profiles, Tuning Project and Competences, in: *Journal of the European Higher Education Area. Policy, Practice and Institutional Engagement*. No. 1, 2012, pp. 71-87.
- Harris, John, Cross National Comparison and exchange: Higher Education, in: Urban Dahllöf et al, *Dimensions of Evaluation: Report of the IMHE Study Group on Evaluation in higher education*. Higher Education Policy Series 13. OECD. London: Jessica Kingley Publishers, 1991
- Hulthof, M.J.F., et al, *Studielaastbepaling in Nederland en omringende landen*. Nijmegen: IOWO instituut voor onderwijskundige dienstverlening, april 2000.
- Karran, Terence, Pan-European Grading Scales: Lessons from National Systems and the ECTS, in: *Higher Education in Europe*. Vol. 30, No. 1, April 2005, pp. 5-22.
- Koshy, Valsa, *Action Research for Improving Educational Practice*. A Step-by-step guide. London: Sage, Second Edition, 2010. Retrieved from: https://www.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/upm-binaries/36584_01_Koshy_et_al_Ch_01.pdf

- MacLeod, Donald, Time bomb, in: *The Guardian*, 25 September 2007. Retrieved from: <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2007/sep/25/students.highereducation>
- Maiworm, Friedrich, Wolfgang Steube and Ulrich Teichler, *ECTS in its Year of Inauguration: The View of the Students*. ERASMUS Monographs No.15. Werkstattberichte – Band 37. Kassel: Wissenschaftliches Zentrum für Berufs- und Hochschulforschung der Gesamthochschule Kassel, 1992.
- Markevicičiene, Raimonda and Alfred Račkauskas, *ECTS – European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System. History, Implementation. Problems*. Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2012.
- Ollard, Emma et al, *Credit Transfer in Higher Education. A review of the literature*. UK Department of Education. March 2017.
- Project Management Institute (PMI), What is Project Management? Retrieved on 1 May 2018 from: <https://www.pmi.org/about/learn-about-pmi/what-is-project-management>
- Samset, Knut, Features of a project. Extract from the textbook '*Project Evaluation. Making Investments Succeed*.' Tapir Academic Press, 2003. Retrieved on 1 May 2018 from: https://www.ntnu.no/documents/1261860271/1262022437/058_2004_samset_what_is_a_project.pdf
- Wagenaar, Robert, An Introduction to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), in: Eric Froment, Jürgen Kohler, Lewis Purser and Lesley Wilson, eds., *EUA Bologna Handbook, Making Bologna Work*, Vol 1, B 2.4-1, Berlin, Stuttgart: Jacob Raabe Verlag, 2006.
- Wagenaar, Robert, Educational Structures, Learning Outcomes, Workload and the Calculation of ECTS Credits, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, 223-246.
- Wagenaar, Robert, *REFORM ! TUNING the Modernisation Process of Higher Education in Europe. A Blueprint for Student-Centred Learning*. Bilbao, Groningen, 2019.

Wagenaar, Robert, The Length of Higher Education Degree Programmes in Europe: Contribution to the Debate by the Tuning Project, in: Julia González and Robert Wagenaar, eds., *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe. Final Report. Phase One*. Deusto and Groningen, 2003, pp. 247-251.

Wüttig, Siegbert, Die Entstehung des Programm namens ERASMUS, in: *DAADeuroletter. ERASMUS Happy Birthday, ERASMUS! Die Erfolgsgeschichte der Europäischen Union feiert 25-jährigen Bestehen*. Sonderausgabe. Bonn: Nationale Agentur für EU-Hochschulzusammenarbeit. August 2013.

Wüttig, Siegbert, Die Entwicklung von ECTS im Überblick, in Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), *Success Stories IV. Das European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) in Deutschland.*, Bonn, 2001.

Annex: ECTS Key Features over time

1990	1995 / 1998	2004
<p>ECTS definition ECTS, the European Community Course Credit Transfer System, is based on the principle of mutual trust and confidence between participating higher education institutions. The few rules of ECTS, concerning Information (on courses available), Agreement (between the home and the host institutions) and the Use of Credit Points (to indicate student workload) are set to reinforce mutual trust and confidence. Each ECTS department describes the courses it offers not only in terms of content but also adding the indication of credits to each course.</p>	<p>ECTS definition ECTS provides an instrument to create transparency, to build bridges between institutions and to widen the choices available to students. The system makes it easier for institutions to recognize the learning achievements of students through the use of commonly understood measures –credits and grades– and it also provides a means to interpret national systems of higher education. The ECTS system is based on three core elements: information (on study programmes and student achievement), mutual agreement (between the partner</p>	<p>ECTS definition The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System is a student-centred system based on the student workload required to achieve the objectives of a programme, objectives preferably specified in terms of the learning outcomes and competences to be acquired.</p>
<p>ECTS credits In ECTS, 60 credits represent the workload of a year of study; normally 30 credits are given for a semester and 20 credits for a term. It is important that no special courses be set up for ECTS purposes, but all ECTS courses be mainstream courses of the participating institutions, as followed by home students under normal regulations.</p>	<p>ECTS credits In ECTS, 60 credits represent the workload of an academic year of study and normally 30 credits for a semester and 20 credits for a term.</p>	<p>ECTS credits ECTS is based on the principle that 60 credits measure the workload of a full-time student during one academic year. The student workload of a full-time study programme in Europe amounts in most cases to around 1500-1800 hours per year and in those cases one credit stands for around 25 to 30 working hours.</p>

2009	2015
<p>ECTS definition</p> <p>ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer based on the transparency of learning outcomes and learning processes. It aims to facilitate planning, delivery, evaluation, recognition and validation of qualifications and units of learning as well as student mobility. ECTS is widely used in formal higher education and can be applied to other lifelong learning activities.</p>	<p>ECTS definition</p> <p>ECTS is a learner-centred system for credit accumulation and transfer, based on the principle of transparency of the learning, teaching and assessment processes. Its objective is to facilitate the planning, delivery and evaluation of study programmes and student mobility by recognising learning achievements and qualifications and periods of learning.</p>
<p>ECTS credits</p> <p>60 ECTS credits are attached to the workload of a full-time year of formal learning (academic year) and the associated learning outcomes. In most cases, student workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, whereby one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work.</p>	<p>ECTS credits</p> <p>ECTS credits express the volume of learning based on the defined learning outcomes and their associated workload. 60 ECTS credits are allocated to the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent, which normally comprises a number of educational components to which credits (on the basis of the learning outcomes and workload) are allocated. ECTS credits are generally expressed in whole numbers.</p>

1990	1995 / 1998	2004
		Learning outcomes Credits in ECTS can only be obtained after successful completion of the work required and appropriate assessment of the learning outcomes achieved. Learning outcomes are sets of competences, expressing what the student will know, understand or be able to do after completion of a process of learning, long or short.
Workload ECTS credits are a value allocated to course units to describe the students' workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work each course requires in relation to the total quantity of work required to complete a full year of academic study at the institution: that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, private work –in the library or at home– and examinations and other assessment activities. ECTS credits express a relative value, with respect to one year's total workload.	Workload ECTS credits are a relative rather than an absolute measure of student workload. They only specify how much of a year's workload a course unit represents at the institution or department allocating the credits.	Workload Student workload in ECTS consists of the time required to complete all planned learning activities such as attending lectures, seminars, independent and private study, preparation of projects, examinations, and so forth.

2009	2015
<p>Learning outcomes ECTS credits are based on the workload students need in order to achieve expected learning outcomes. Learning outcomes describe what a learner is expected to know, understand and be able to do after successful completion of a process of learning. They relate to level descriptors in national and European qualifications frameworks.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes Learning outcomes are statements of what the individual knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process. The achievement of learning outcomes has to be assessed through procedures based on clear and transparent criteria. Learning outcomes are attributed to individual educational components and to programmes at a whole. They are also used in European and national qualifications frameworks to describe the level of the individual qualification.</p>
<p>Workload Workload indicates the time students typically need to complete all learning activities (such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, self-study and examinations) required to achieve the expected learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Workload Workload is an estimation of the time the individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. The correspondence of the full-time workload of an academic year to 60 credits is often formalised by national legal provisions. In most cases, workload ranges from 1,500 to 1,800 hours for an academic year, which means that one credit corresponds to 25 to 30 hours of work. It should be recognised that this represents the typical workload and that for individual students the actual time to achieve the learning outcomes will vary.</p>

1990	1995 / 1998	2004
Allocation of credits It is up to the participating institutions to subdivide the credits for the different courses. Practical placements and optional courses which form an integral part of the courses of study also receive academic credit. Non-credit courses may, however, be mentioned in the transcript of records.	Allocation of credits ECTS credits are a numerical value (between 1 and 60) allocated to course units to describe the student workload required to complete them. They reflect the quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of academic study at the institution, that is, lectures, practical work, seminars, tutorials, fieldwork, private study –in the library or at home– and examinations or other assessment activities. ECTS is thus based on a full student workload and not limited to contact hours only.	Allocation of credits Credits are allocated to all educational components of a study programme (such as modules, courses, placements, dissertation work, etc.) and reflect the quantity of work each component requires to achieve its specific objectives or learning outcomes in relation to the total quantity of work necessary to complete a full year of study successfully.
Awarding of credits Credits are awarded only when the courses have been completed and all the required examinations have been successfully taken.	Awarding of credits ECTS credits are allocated to course units but are only awarded to students who successfully complete the course by satisfying the assessment requirements. In other words students do not get credits simply for attending classes or spending time abroad – they must satisfy the assessment regulations specified at the host institution to demonstrate that they fulfilled the stated learning objectives for the course unit. The assessment procedure may take various forms: written or oral examinations, coursework, a combination of the two or other means such as presentations at seminars, information on which should be included in the information package.	Awarding of credits (See Learning outcomes)

2009	2015
<p>Allocation of credits</p> <p>Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or study programmes as well as to their educational components (such as modules, course units, dissertation work, work placements and laboratory work). The number of credits ascribed to each component is based on its weight in terms of the workload students need in order to achieve the learning outcomes in a formal context.</p>	<p>Allocation of credits</p> <p>Allocation of credits in ECTS is the process of assigning a number of credits to qualifications, degree programmes or single educational components. Credits are allocated to entire qualifications or programmes according to national legislation or practice, where appropriate, and with reference to national and/or European qualifications frameworks. They are allocated to educational components, such as course units, dissertations, work-based learning and work placements, taking as a basis the allocation of 60 credits per full-time academic year, according to the estimated workload required to achieve the defined learning outcomes for each component.</p>
<p>Awarding of credits</p> <p>Credits are awarded to individual students (full-time or part-time) after completion of the learning activities required by a formal programme of study or by a single educational component and the successful assessment of the achieved learning outcomes.</p>	<p>Awarding of credits</p> <p>Awarding credits in ECTS is the act of formally granting students and other learners the credits that are assigned to the qualification and/or its components if they achieve the defined learning outcomes. National authorities should indicate which institutions have the right to award ECTS credits. Credits are awarded to individual students after they have completed the required learning activities and achieved the defined learning outcomes, as evidenced by appropriate assessment. If students and other learners have achieved learning outcomes in other formal, non-formal, or informal learning contexts or time-frames, credits may be awarded through assessment and recognition of these learning outcomes.</p>

1990	1995 / 1998	2004
<p>Transfer of credits The students participating in ECTS will receive full credit for all academic work successfully carried out at any of the ECTS partner institutions and they will be able to transfer these academic credits from one participating institution to another on the basis of prior agreement on the content of study programs abroad between students and the institutions involved. (...) When the student has successfully completed the study program previously agreed between the home and the host institutions, and returns to the home institution, credit transfer will then take place, and the student will continue the study course of his/her home institution without any loss of time or credit. If, on the other hand, the student decides to stay at the host institution and to take the degree there, he/she may have to adapt his/her study course due to the legal, institutional and departmental rules in the host country, institution and department.</p>	<p>Transfer of credits Home and host institutions prepare and exchange transcripts of records (...) for each student participating in ECTS before and after the period of study abroad. A copy of these transcripts is given to the student for his/her personal file. The home institution recognizes the amount of credits received by their students from partner institutions abroad in respect of specific course units such that the credits for the course unit passed replace the credits which would otherwise have been obtained from the home institution. Thus full academic recognition is given.</p>	

2009	2015
<p>Accumulation of credits</p> <p>Credits may be accumulated with a view to obtaining qualifications, as decided by the degree-awarding institution. If students have achieved learning outcomes in other learning contexts or timeframes (formal, non-formal or informal), the associated credits may be awarded after successful assessment, validation or recognition of these learning outcomes</p>	<p>Accumulation of credits</p> <p>Accumulation of credits in ECTS is the process of collecting credits awarded for achieving the learning outcomes of educational components in formal contexts and for other learning activities carried out in informal and non-formal contexts. A student can accumulate credits in order to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - obtain qualifications, as required by the degree-awarding institution; - document personal achievements for lifelong learning purposes.
<p>Transfer of credits</p> <p>Credits awarded in one programme may be transferred into another programme, offered by the same or another institution. This transfer can only take place if the degree-awarding institution recognises the credits and the associated learning outcomes. Partner institutions should agree in advance on the recognition of periods of study abroad.</p>	<p>Transfer of credits</p> <p>Transfer of credits is the process of having credits awarded in one context (programme, institution) recognised in another formal context for the purpose of obtaining a qualification. Credits awarded to students in one programme may be transferred from an institution to be accumulated in another programme offered by the same or another institution. Credit transfer is the key to successful study mobility. Institutions, faculties, departments may make agreements which guarantee automatic recognition and transfer of credits.</p>

1990	1995 / 1998	2004

2009	2015
	ECTS documentation The use of ECTS credits is facilitated and quality enhanced by the supporting documents (Course Catalogue, Learning Agreement, Transcript of Records, and Work Placement Certificate). ECTS also contributes to transparency in other documents such as the Diploma Supplement.





